

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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IS HE POPENJOY?

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER LXI. THE NEWS COMES HOME.

DURING those last days of the glory of the baroness, when she was driving about London under the auspices of Philogunac Cœlebs in her private brougham, and talking to everyone of the certainty of her coming success, Lord George Germain was not in London either to hear or to see what was going on. He had gone again to Naples, having received a letter from the British consul there, telling him that his brother was certainly dying. The reader will understand that he must have been most unwilling to take this journey. He at first refused to do so, alleging that his brother's conduct to him had severed all ties between them; but at last he allowed himself to be persuaded by the joint efforts of Mr. Knox, Mr. Stokes, and Lady Sarah, who actually came up to London herself for the purpose of inducing him to take the journey. "He is not only your brother," said Lady Sarah, "but the head of your family as well. It is not for the honour of the family that he should pass away without having someone belonging to him at the last moment." When Lord George argued that he would in all probability be too late, Lady Sarah explained that the last moments of a Marquis of Brotherton could not have come as long as his body was above ground.

So urged, the poor man started again, and found his brother still alive, but senseless. This was towards the end of March, and it is hoped that the reader

will remember the event which was to take place in April. The coincidence of the two things added, of course, very greatly to his annoyance. Telegrams might come to him twice a-day, but no telegram could bring him back in a flash when the moment of peril should arrive, or enable him to enjoy the rapture of standing at his wife's bedside when the peril should be over. He felt as he went away from his brother's villa to the nearest hotel—for he would not sleep nor eat in the villa—that he was a man marked out for misfortune. When he returned to the villa on the next morning, the Marquis of Brotherton was no more. His lordship had died in the forty-fourth year of his age, on the 30th of March, 187—.

The Marquis of Brotherton was dead, and Lord George Germain was Marquis of Brotherton, and would be so called by all the world as soon as his brother was decently hidden under the ground. It concerns our story now to say that Mary Lovelace was Marchioness of Brotherton, and that the Dean of Brotherton was the father-in-law of a marquis, and would, in all probability, be the progenitor of a long line of marquises. Lord George, as soon as the event was known, caused telegrams to be sent to Mr. Knox, to Lady Sarah, and to the dean. He had hesitated about the last, but his better nature at last prevailed. He was well aware that no one was so anxious as the dean, and though he disliked and condemned the dean's anxiety, he remembered that the dean had at any rate been a loving father to his wife, and a very liberal father-in-law.

Mr. Knox, when he received the news, went at once to Mr. Stokes, and the two gentlemen were not long in agreeing that

a very troublesome and useless person had been removed out of the world. "Oh yes; there's a will," said Mr. Stokes, in answer to an enquiry from Mr. Knex, "made while he was in London the other day, just before he started—as bad a will as a man could make; but he couldn't do very much harm. Every acre was entailed."

"How about the house in town?" asked Mr. Knex.

"Entailed on the baby about to be born, if he happens to be a boy."

"He didn't spend his income?" suggested Mr. Knex.

"He muddled a lot of money away; but since the coal came up he couldn't spend it all, I should say."

"Who gets it?" asked Mr. Knex, laughing.

"We shall see that when the will is read," said the attorney with a smile.

The news was brought out to Lady Sarah, as quickly as the very wretched pony which served for the Brotherton telegraph express could bring it. The hour which was lost in getting the pony ready, perhaps, did not signify much. Lady Sarah, at the moment, was busy with her needle, and her sisters were with her. "What is it?" said Lady Susanna, jumping up. Lady Sarah, with cruel delay, kept the telegram for a moment in her hand. "Do open it," said Lady Amelia; "is it from George? Pray open it; pray do!" Lady Sarah, feeling certain of the contents of the envelope, and knowing the importance of the news, slowly opened the cover. "It is all over," she said; "Poor Brotherton!" Lady Amelia burst into tears. "He was never so very unkind to me," said Lady Susanna, with her handkerchief up to her eyes. "I cannot say that he was good to me," said Lady Sarah, "but it may be that I was hard to him. May God Almighty forgive him all that he did amiss!"

Then there was a consultation held, and it was decided that Mary and the marchioness must both be told at once. "Mamma will be dreadfully cut up," said Lady Susanna. Then Lady Amelia suggested that their mother's attention should be at once drawn off to Mary's condition, for the marchioness at this time was much worried in her feelings about Mary.

The telegram had arrived in the afternoon, at the hour in which Mary was accustomed to sit in the easy-chair with the marchioness. The penalty had now been reduced to an hour a day, and this, as it happened, was the hour. The mar-

chioness had been wandering a good deal in her mind. From time to time she expressed her opinion that Brotherton would get well and would come back; and she would then tell Mary how she ought to urge her husband to behave well to his elder brother, always asserting that George had been stiff-necked and perverse. But in the midst of all this she would refer every minute to Mary's coming baby as the coming Popenjoy—not a possible Popenjoy at some future time, but the immediate Popenjoy of the hour—to be born a Popenjoy! Poor Mary, in answer to all this, would agree with everything. She never contradicted the old lady, but sat longing that the hour might come to an end.

Lady Sarah entered the room, followed by her two sisters. "Is there any news?" asked Mary.

"Has Brotherton come back?" demanded the marchioness.

"Dear mamma!" said Lady Sarah; and she went up and knelt down before her mother and took her hand.

"Where is he?" asked the marchioness.

"Dear mamma! He has gone away—beyond all trouble."

"Who has gone away?"

"Brotherton is—dead, mamma. This is a telegram from George." The old woman looked bewildered, as though she did not as yet quite comprehend what had been said to her. "You know," continued Lady Sarah, "that he was so ill that we all expected this."

"Expected what?"

"That my brother could not live."

"Where is George? What has George done? If George had gone to him—Oh me! Dead! He is not dead! And what has become of the child?"

"You should think of Mary, mamma."

"My dear, of course I think of you. I am thinking of nothing else. Sarah—you don't mean to say that Brotherton is—dead?" Lady Sarah merely pressed her mother's hand, and looked into the old lady's face. "Why did not they let me go to him? And is Popenjoy dead also?"

"Dear mamma, don't you remember?" said Lady Susanna.

"Yes; I remember. George was determined it should be so. Ah me! ah me! Why should I have lived to hear this!" After that it was in vain that they told her of Mary, and of the baby that was about to be born. She wept herself into hysterics, was taken away and

put to bed; and then soon wept herself asleep.

Mary during all this had said not a word. She had felt that the moment of her exaltation—the moment in which she had become the mistress of the house and of everything around it—was not a time in which she could dare even speak to the bereaved mother. But when the two younger sisters had gone away with the marchioness, she asked after her husband. Then Lady Sarah showed her the telegram, in which Lord George, after communicating the death of his brother, had simply said that he should himself return home as quickly as possible. "It has come very quick," said Lady Sarah.

"What has come?"

"Your position, Mary. I hope—I hope you will bear it well."

"I hope so," said Mary, almost sullenly. But she was awestruck, and not sullen.

"It will all be yours now—the rank, the wealth, the position, the power of spending money, and tribes of friends anxious to share your prosperity. Hitherto you have only seen the gloom of this place, which to you has of course been dull. Now it will be lighted up, and you can make it gay enough."

"This is not a time to think of gaiety," said Mary.

"Poor Brotherton was nothing to you. I do not think you ever saw him."

"Never."

"He was nothing to you. You cannot mourn."

"I do mourn. I wish he had lived. I wish the boy had lived. If you have thought that I wanted all this, you have done me wrong. I have wanted nothing but to have George to live with me. If anybody thinks that I married him because all this might come—oh, they do not know me."

"I know you, Mary."

"Then you will not believe that."

"I do not believe it. I have never believed it. I know that you are good, and disinterested, and true of heart. I have loved you dearly and more dearly as I have seen you every day. But Mary, you are fond of what the world calls—pleasure."

"Yes," said Mary, after a pause, "I am fond of pleasure. Why not? I hope I am not fond of doing harm to anyone."

"If you will only remember how great are your duties. You may have children to whom you may do harm. You have a

husband, who will now have many cares, and to whom much harm may be done. Among women you will be the head of a noble family, and may grace or disgrace them all by your conduct."

"I will never disgrace them," she said proudly.

"Not openly, not manifestly, I am sure. Do you think that there are no temptations in your way?"

"Everybody has temptations."

"Who will have more than you? Have you thought that every tenant, every labourer on the estate will have a claim on you?"

"How can I have thought of anything yet?"

"Don't be angry with me, dear, if I bid you think of it. I think of it—more, I know, than I ought to do. I have been so placed that I could do but little good and little harm to others than myself. The females of a family such as ours, unless they marry, are very insignificant in the world. You, who but a few years ago were a little school-girl in Brotherton, have now been put over all our heads."

"I didn't want to be put over anybody's head."

"Fortune has done it for you, and your own attractions. But I was going to say that, little as has been my power, and low as is my condition, I have loved the family, and striven to maintain its respectability. There is not, I think, a face on the estate I do not know. I shall have to go now, and see them no more."

"Why should you go?"

"It will probably be proper. No married man likes to have his unmarried sisters in his house."

"I shall like you. You shall never go."

"Of course I shall go with mamma and the others. But I would have you sometimes think of me and those I have cared for, and I would have you bear in mind that the Marchioness of Brotherton should have more to do than to amuse herself."

Whatever assurances Mary might have made, or have declined to make, in answer to this, were stopped by the entrance of a servant, who came to inform Lady George that her father was below. The dean, too, had received his telegram, and had at once ridden over to greet the new Marchioness of Brotherton.

Of all those who first heard the news, the dean's feelings were by far the strongest. It cannot be said of any of the Germaines that there was sincere and abiding grief

at the death of the late marquis. The poor mother was in such a state, was mentally so weak, that she was in truth no longer capable of strong grief or strong joy. And the man had been, not only so bad, but so injurious also, to all connected with him—had contrived of late to make his whole family so uncomfortable—that he had worn out even that enduring love which comes of custom. He had been a blister to them—assuring them constantly that he would ever be a blister; and they could not weep in their hearts because the blister was removed. But neither did they rejoice. Mary, when, in her simple language, she had said that she did not want it, had spoken the plain truth. Munster Court, with her husband's love, and the power to go to Mrs. Jones's parties, sufficed for her ambition. That her husband should be gentle with her, should caress her as well as love her, was all the world to her. She feared rather than coveted the title of marchioness, and dreaded that gloomy house in the square with all her heart. But to the dean the triumph was a triumph indeed, and the joy was a joy! He had set his heart upon it from the first moment in which Lord George had been spoken of as a suitor for his daughter's hand—looking forward to it with the assured hope of a very sanguine man. The late marquis had been much younger than he, but he calculated that his own life had been wholesome, while that of the marquis was the reverse. Then had come the tidings of the marquis's marriage. That had been bad—but he had again told himself how probable it was that the marquis should have no son. And then the lord had brought home a son. All suddenly there had come to him the tidings that a brat called Popenjoy—a brat who in life would crush all his hopes—was already in the house at Manor Cross! He would not for a moment believe in the brat. He would prove that the boy was not Popenjoy, though he should have to spend his last shilling in doing so. He had set his heart upon the prize, and he would allow nothing to stand in his way.

And now the prize had come before his daughter had been two years married, before the grandchild was born on whose head was to be accumulated all these honours! There was no longer any doubt. The marquis was gone, and that false Popenjoy was gone; and his daughter was the wife of the reigning lord, and the child—his grandchild—was about to be

born. He was sure that the child would be a boy! But even were a girl the eldest, there would be time enough for boys after that. There surely would be a real Popenjoy before long.

And what was he to gain—he himself? He often asked himself the question, but could always answer it satisfactorily. He had risen above his father's station, by his own intellect and industry, so high as to be able to exalt his daughter among the highest in the land. He could hardly have become a marquis himself. That career could not have been open to him; but a sufficiency of the sweets of the peerage would be his own if he could see his daughter a marchioness. And now that was her rank. Fate could not take it away from her. Though Lord George were to die to-morrow, she would still be a marchioness, and the coming boy, his grandson, would be the marquis. He himself was young for his age. He might yet live to hear his grandson make a speech in the House of Commons as Lord Popenjoy.

He had been out about the city, and received the telegram at three o'clock. He felt at the moment intensely grateful to Lord George for having sent it—as he would have been full of wrath had none been sent to him. There was no reference to "Poor Brotherton!" on his tongue; no reference to "Poor Brotherton!" in his heart. The man had grossly maligned his daughter to his own ears, had insulted him with bitter malignity, and had been his enemy. He did not pretend to himself that he felt either sorrow or pity. The man had been a wretch and his enemy, and was now dead; and he was thoroughly glad that the wretch was out of his way. "Marchioness of Brotherton!" he said to himself, as he rested for a few minutes alone in his study. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking up at the ceiling, and realising it all. Yes; all that was quite true which had been said to himself more than once. He had begun his life as a stable-boy. He could remember the time when his father touched his hat to everybody that came into the yard. Nevertheless he was Dean of Brotherton, and so much a dean as to have got the better of all enemies in the Close. And his daughter was Marchioness of Brotherton. She would be Mary to him, and would administer to his little comforts, when men descended from the comrades of William the Conqueror would treat her

with semi-regal respect. He told himself that he was sure of his daughter.

Then he ordered his horse, and started off to ride to Manor Cross. He did not doubt but that she knew it already, but still it was necessary that she should hear it from his lips and he from hers. As he rode proudly beneath the Manor Cross oaks, he told himself again and again that they would all belong to his grandson.

When the dean was announced, Mary almost feared to see him, or rather feared that expression of triumph which would certainly be made both by his words and manner. All that Lady Sarah had said had entered into her mind. There were duties incumbent on her which would be very heavy, for which she felt that she could hardly be fit—and the first of these duties was to abstain from pride as to her own station in life. But her father she knew would be very proud, and would almost demand pride from her. She hurried down to him nevertheless. Were she ten times a marchioness, next to her husband her care would be due to him. What daughter had ever been beloved more tenderly than she? Administer to him! Oh yes, she would do that as she had always done. She rushed into his arms in the little parlour and then burst into tears.

"My girl," he said, "I congratulate you."

"No, no, no."

"Yes, yes, yes. Is it not better in all ways that it should be so? I do congratulate you. Hold up your head, dear, and bear it well."

"Oh papa, I shall never bear it well."

"No woman that was ever born has, I believe, borne it better than you will. No woman was ever more fit to grace a high position. My own girl!"

"Yes, papa, your own girl. But I wish—I wish——"

"All that I have wished has come about." She shuddered as she heard these words, remembering that two deaths had been necessary for this fruition of his desires. But he repeated his words. "All that I have wished has come about. And, Mary, let me tell you this—you should in no wise be afraid of it, nor should you allow yourself to think of it as though there were anything to be regretted. Which do you believe would make the better peer; your husband or that man who has died?"

"Of course George is ten times the best."

"Otherwise he would be very bad. But no degree of comparison would express the difference. Your husband will add an honour to his rank." She took his hand and kissed it as he said this—which certainly would not have been said had not that telegram come direct to the Deanery. "And, looking to the future, which would probably make the better peer in coming years—the child born of that man and woman, and bred by them as they would have bred it, or your child—yours and your husband's? And here, in the country—from which lord would the tenants receive the stricter justice, and the people the more enduring kindness? Don't you know that he disgraced his order, and that the woman was unfit to bear the name which rightly or wrongly she had assumed? You will be fit."

"No, papa."

"Excuse me, dear. I am praising myself rather than you when I say Yes. But though I praise myself, it is a matter as to which I have no shadow of doubt. There can be nothing to regret—no cause for sorrow. With the inmates of this house, custom demands the decency of outward mourning; but there can be no grief of heart. The man was a wild beast, destroying everybody and everything that came near him. Only think how he treated your husband."

"He is dead, papa!"

"I thank God that he has gone. I cannot bring myself to lie about it. I hate such lying. To me it is unmanly. Grief or joy, regrets or satisfaction, when expressed, should always be true. It is a grand thing to rise in the world. The ambition to do so is the very salt of the earth. It is the parent of all enterprise, and the cause of all improvement. They who know no such ambition are savages and remain savage. As far as I can see, among us Englishmen such ambition is, healthily and happily, almost universal, and on that account we stand high among the citizens of the world. But, owing to false teaching, men are afraid to own aloud a truth which is known to their own hearts. I am not afraid to do so, and I would not have you afraid. I am proud that, by one step after another, I have been able so to place you and so to form you, that you should have been found worthy of rank much higher than my own. And I would have you proud also and equally ambitious for your child. Let him be the Duke of Brotherton. Let him be brought

up to be one of England's statesmen, if God shall give him intellect for the work. Let him be seen with the George and Garter, and be known throughout Europe as one of England's worthiest worthies. Though not born as yet, his career should already be a care to you. And that he may be great, you should rejoice that you yourself are great already."

After that he went away, leaving messages for Lord George and the family. He bade her tell Lady Sarah that he would not intrude on the present occasion, but that he hoped to be allowed to see the ladies of the family very shortly after the funeral.

Poor Mary could not but be bewildered by the difference of the two lessons she had received, on this the first day of her assured honours. And she was the more perplexed, because both her instructors had appeared to her to be right in their teaching. The pagan exaltation of her father at the death of his enemy she could put on one side, excusing it by the remembrance of the terrible insult which she knew that he had received. But the upshot of his philosophy she did receive as true, and she declared to herself that she would harbour in her heart of hearts the lessons which he had given her as to her own child—lessons which must be noble, as they tended to the well-being of the world at large. To make her child able to do good to others, to assist in making him able and anxious to do so—to train him from the first in that way—what wish could be more worthy of a mother than this? But yet the humility and homely carefulness inculcated by Lady Sarah—was not that lesson also true? Assuredly yes! And yet how should she combine the two?

She was unaware that within herself there was a power, a certain intellectual alembic of which she was quite unconscious, by which she could distil the good of each, and quietly leave the residuum behind her as being of no moment.

LAL.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

WE colonists are apt to say that there is no twilight in New Zealand, when waxing sentimental over memories of the land of our birth, and recalling many a pleasant half-hour "between the lights."

But although we have no lingering dusk, sunset with us seems to have a

peculiar beauty, and a tender power to steal into one's heart. Many a time have I, rough colonial as I am, stood, on my way home, to watch the fantastic clouds and colours of the sky as night drew on.

Such a sunset-glory lit up the whole sky, and the scarcely heaving sea beneath, one autumn evening many years ago, as I was riding home on a tired horse, after a hard day's pounding after the outlying sheep.

At that time I was about thirty years old, and had a snug billet as manager on one of Lulworth and Clint's great runs near Nelson. Five hundred a year, with unlimited grub, and a sufficiently weather-tight house on the station, was no bad thing for a penniless man with no interest; and I often plumed myself on my own good luck when I came across other fellows, with twice my brains, and a little money, who could hardly pay for their bread and cheese.

"A beautiful sky, Sprightly," I said, patting my old chestnut as he carefully picked his way down the face of a steep hill covered with manuka scrub and yellowing ferns; "but wind to-morrow, and rain before to-morrow night."

Sprightly shook his head till the bridle rang, and stepped out at my voice. Winding down we went, till the interminable hill ended abruptly in a reach of level sand, along which we could canter for a couple of miles.

The sunset colours were fading from the high peaks we had left, but enough light lingered on the flat to give brilliant hues to the rocks, which towered over our heads, or lay like fallen giants in our path; while far out to sea, beyond the shadow of the shore, stretched a long streak of amber.

I rode that way twice a week, as a rule, sometimes oftener; but never do I remember to have met a living creature to exchange good-night with till this particular evening, when, no sooner had Sprightly started at a weary canter over the flat, than I pulled him up short, in sheer amazement, for there in front was a fellow dressed like a picture, riding at a foot pace just in the direction we were going in too.

"Who the deuce can it be?" was my first mental observation. "Ten to one it's some new chum come to spy out the land; though I'll answer that chap don't know a sheep when he sees it."

As I neared my unconscious friend, I

took in the fact that he rode his horse like a gentleman; that his saddle, bridle, and saddlebags were new and glossy; that, in fact, from his jaunty wideawake to his English-made boots, he was a new chum. Riding up alongside, I observed a white collar and a pair of dogskin gloves, which removed any lingering doubts as to the fact.

"Good evening, mate," I called out, when I got quite up to the stranger; "going far to-night?"

"Not much farther, I hope," he answered, turning a face of almost girlish beauty upon me, and slightly raising his hat. "But that is a question I should be glad to ask you; that is, if you know this part of the country well."

"Lived here these six years, and know every corner a sheep can hide in," I answered, rather grimly, contrasting his high-bred accents with my own colonialisms.

"Ah! then you can tell me, where is this Wyke Station?"

"This Wyke Station," I replied, in my crustiest manner, "is where I hope to be eating my supper in half an hour's time. And pray, sir, what may be your business there?"

The newcomer turned to look more closely at me.

"Why you must be—of course you must be—Mr. Ralph Westcott; the very man I am going to see."

"I am Ralph Westcott," I rejoined, seeing he paused, as if expecting me to say something.

"I thought so. Well, I am Fairfax Clint. How d'ye do? I am awfully glad to meet you on this dreary and interminable mud-flat." So saying, he extended his hand with such a cordial gesture, that I felt ashamed of my bearish manners, and gave him a hearty grip.

"Didn't the governor write and tell you I was coming out?" he asked, as we resumed our journey.

"Several mails back, he wrote that you might possibly be sent out, but I never heard anything certain."

"Oh, well, you see, Westcott, the governor is getting old, and closer and more suspicious every day. Lately he won't even allow a fellow an opinion of his own. So one fine morning I got marching, or rather sailing orders, and here I am."

All this was said in the same quiet, rather bored manner which had set my back up before; still, I could not help

softening to the boy, when I looked at his face, and thought how unfit he would prove for Station life.

"And what do you mean to do, Mr. Clint, now you are here?" I asked, after a pause.

"Do? Oh, nothing that I know of. I suppose I shall stay with you till I get orders to start again. I'll go about with you, unless you don't want my company; and I suppose I must write a 'report,' for the governor's benefit, every month, in which I hope you'll help me."

He laughed as if there was a joke somewhere, but for my part I felt rather put out. Here was a great baby sent out for me to take in tow, and yet all the time he was my "Boss," and had to report on my management. I was a bit of an autocrat on my station, and resented this.

Fairfax Clint seemed to guess what I was thinking. "Look here, Westcott," he said, touching my horse's neck with his whip, and speaking in a more manly and earnest tone, which I liked better; "my father's all wrong in this business. What's the use of his sending me out to overlook his runs, when I know less than a child about such things; but that's no business of mine, and still less of yours. Let us be friends while we are together. Forget that my name is Clint at all! Call me Fairfax, and fancy me a new hand you've just picked up to clean your boots and saddle your horse. I can do both, I assure you."

All the while he had been speaking we had slowly climbed a steep hill, clothed with white-flowering manuka and fern. As he ceased we reached the summit, and began to descend on the other side, so my only answer was to point out the stock-yard in the valley at our feet, flanked by a single-storied wooden house.

"There's Wyke Station. I've lived here for six years, and am glad to welcome a son of the firm to it."

"That's kindly said," he answered gravely, falling back in the narrow path. "I'll follow you, and only trust this brute is surefooted."

We reached the stock-yard, and tied up our horses, the dogs rushing out to welcome us, and Tom, the cook, opening the house-door and showing a warm glow of firelight.

"Come in, Mr. Clint," I said, "and be prepared to rough it. This is the kitchen; here's the parlour, which is drawing-room, smoking-room, and feeding-room in one;

you see there's no lack of dry wood here, so we have good fires; here's my bedroom, and yonder room shall be got ready for you by the time supper's over. Meantime, make yourself at home, and use mine," and having, as I thought, done the honours handsomely, I kicked the smouldering logs into a crackling blaze, and left him in possession of my sanctum. When I came in from seeing to our horses, I found Clint in the kitchen, already at home, chatting to Tom, as that old rascal fried mutton-chops and potatoes.

"By Jove, I never thought of my horse," he exclaimed in consternation, as he caught sight of me coming in from the yard with his and my saddle; "why on earth didn't you tell me, Westcott?"

"Did you think we kept a groom here?" I retorted. "Never mind, young 'un; you shall do both horses to-morrow, I promise you. Show a light, Tom, while I wash my hands, and then for supper, for I'm starving."

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE a week was over, Fairfax Clint was familiar with every corner of the run, and had made himself popular with all hands.

Never did I know a human being with such a gift of fascination, or such an inexhaustible flow of spirits and quaint humour.

Yet he was never noisy, very seldom laughed, and about his face and voice sometimes seemed to hang a melancholy shadow. I thought, afterwards, a fore-shadow of what was coming.

But, as I say, never was there a man so popular; even our rugged old Scotch shepherd found a smile for Clint's cheerful, "Well, old Thistles;" while as for Tom, our cook and man of all work, I verily believe the happiest moments of his life were when Fairfax took into his head to assist in the kitchen, making Tom fetch the ingredients, and wait on him, while he elaborated uneatable messes for our evening spread.

Though at first I had hated the idea of anyone always following me about, and had perhaps found Clint's ignorance rather boring, after the first amusement wore off, still I got quite to miss the lad whenever he went off to Nelson for a day or two, and to feel lonely, and off my feed, when I sat down without his face at the other end of our table.

Among other of his fancies when first

he came, was one for a garden. "Waste of time," I growled; "the weeds will outrun the flowers." But he laughed at me, and set to work all the same, and really he worked well; for though digging blistered his hands, and the sun scorched his face brick-colour, he persevered until he had a plot of ground fenced in and planted to his mind.

"Flowers are great humanisers," he would say; "only look at these children, my dear Ralph."

"These children" were a dirty, ragged, barefooted quartet from our second shepherd's hut, who hovered about wherever Clint was, and worshipped him as a wonderful being from a world afar.

Poor little wretches! At one time I had made some efforts to improve them; and, thinking it best to strike at the root of the matter, began by urging their miserable, reprobate mother to introduce something like order and neatness into their hut. But I never made the attempt twice, being met by a torrent of half-tipsy abuse, and threatened with the loss of her husband—an invaluable station-hand, and one I should really have been unwilling to lose.

The only step I could take to mitigate the nuisance was to remove the whole family to an old hut a mile farther from the station, where Mrs. Mahaffy's peculiarities were less obtrusive. It would have seemed a wretched place, perhaps, to many an English cottager, perched on a hillside, roughly built of planks half an inch apart, and thatched with towi-grass. But, such as it was, I've known people live happily there, and make it look neat and pleasant too. Pretty it could not fail to be in such a situation; and it always seemed to me a sin to poison such a view with cabbage-stalks, and potato-parings, and heaps of stinking mussel-shells.

Did the miserable, shock-headed imps, who sprawled among the fern, hatless and shoeless, never see the yellow sands below their hillside, and the restless, ever-changing sea? Did they never look up and learn anything from the peaks overhead, which, clothed with dark shrubs and leafage, towered above till they set a sharp gleam of snow against the blue of the sky?

These are some of the questions I used to ask myself when I first went to Wyke; but you see I had other things to think about, and like most reformers, after I had removed the blot a little farther from my

own door, I forgot all about the needs, material and spiritual, of the young Mahaffys.

In fact, I felt half amused at the concern and disgust Clint expressed, the first time his wanderings brought him in contact with this interesting family.

"Ah my boy, at first I felt just as you do; but I found it waste of time, as you will."

However, whether Clint was more persevering, or whether he found out a better way to go to work, I can't say; but, to my amazement, one Sunday afternoon, when the Reverend Walter Hooper, a right good parson, rode over as usual to preach to us, and the station-hands were mustering in our verandah, up came a little procession, with very clean and shy faces and new pinafores, which for the life of me I couldn't identify. The truth only dawned on me when I saw Clint, with that indescribable grace of his, rise from his rug in the corner, and take Lal, the eldest girl, by the hand to show her a seat.

Through all the service Lal kept her eyes fixed with humble adoration on Clint's face, rising or kneeling as he did: and, after that, every Sunday, whatever the lapses in the week might be, she never failed to appear, scrubbed and tidy, at the service hour.

"How on earth have you done it, Fairfax?" I asked the same night, while we were having our last smoke before turning in. He laughed. "My dear fellow, don't ask me. I never felt more astonished in my life, or more humbled, if you can understand. I did give Lal a talking to about a week ago, and a few shillings to rig out the kids afresh, but I had no notion that what I had said would have produced such a stupendous effect. And to tell you the truth, Ralph, I felt ashamed to think how little one really tries to do, when I saw that poor girl coming up so bravely just for a few words of mine! If you won't laugh, old fellow, I am going to have Lal and her brothers up twice a week till they know how to read."

"Laugh! I honour you for it, only won't you find it an awful grind?"

"Why, yes, I'm afraid I shall," answered Fairfax, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and staring at the fire; "and yet I can't look at a poor wretch like Lal without feeling uncomfortable. I suppose it's what parsons call conscience; and my conscience won't let me rest till I've

taught these young savages, at any rate, what little I know myself."

So Clint's evening school began—began at the kitchen-table after supper was over; the pupils being Alice Mahaffy, popularly known as "Lal," and her brothers, Bill and Ted; and the schoolmaster being that ineffable swell, Mr. Fairfax Clint.

Ted and Bill, having grown up like young goats on the open hillside, were sharp enough to all outdoor signs and sounds, but hopelessly dense when it came to the alphabet. But Lal proved a wonder to herself, and a source of pride to her teacher. Never was a girl so determined to learn what at first seemed perfectly incomprehensible and bewildering. Many a time have I gone to the kitchen to look on, and have seen Lal, with knit brows and flushed face, bending over her book, and muttering fiercely between her teeth: "I'll see it sometime, Muster Clint; try me again! but I'm such a fool to-night."

One night, long after the little class had been dismissed, I found Lal crouching against the outer door in a wild fit of weeping.

"Hallo, Lal, what's up?" I asked, pulling her into the moonlight; "has that precious mother been hammering you again?" But no answer could I extract except a not very polite request to leave her alone, and wrenching herself out of my grasp, she ran away and hid herself among the manuka.

This little incident would not have remained probably in my mind, but for the chance remark of our parson one Sunday shortly afterwards. I had been riding part-way home with him after service, and as we went up the hill by the Mahaffys' hut, we came on Lal, lying asleep full-length under a wild cherry-tree, with her hands behind her head for a pillow, and an open spelling-book beside her. She seemed to have cried herself to sleep, for the long lashes resting on her cheek were wet, and matted into little points, and she sobbed as we passed by.

"That poor child! I am afraid her mother ill-treats her," said Parson Hooper; "and what a pretty girl she is growing!"

Pretty! I was too struck with this new view of Lal to dispute it, and my companion passed on to other subjects; but as soon as I parted from him, I rode back quickly to the spot where we passed the sleeping girl. But she was gone, and I had to ride home without deciding the question whether Parson's eyes or mine

had been mistaken. At the verandah door, however, I saw Lal with her milk-can waiting till Tom chose to find time to fill it for her, leaning cross-legged against the door-post, and looking moodily out at the sea.

I walked up, and took a critical survey. A long-limbed girl, with a very short, and rather ragged, stuff frock; bare feet, brown as berries; arms and hands to match; a good deal of brown hair, which lately she had taken to brushing and tying back with a scrap of faded ribbon; a thin face, with a flush of bright colour in the cheeks; and a pair of brown eyes, which were always watchful and suspicious to me, but soft and wistful to Clint. My eyes, sharpened by Parson's careless remark, took note of all these points, and I summoned Lal sharply to me.

"Well, Mr. Westcott," she said, coming unwillingly, and scowling at me with her straight black brows.

"How old are you, Lal?"

"I've turned fifteen last summer; but it ain't no business o' yourn, is it, Mr. Westcott?"

"Not much, perhaps; but you are growing a big girl, and ought to go to service somewhere. Wouldn't you like to go away from this dull place?"

"Go away from the station!" echoed Lal, all the colour fading out of her face as she raised her startled eyes to mine; "I couldn't do it! Besides, who'd like to have me for a servant?" she added, with a scornful little laugh.

"But if you'd like to try it, Lal, I could try for you," I went on, but she interrupted me fiercely:

"Look here, Mr. Westcott; I know I ain't a good girl, but I don't know as ever I did you any harm, that you should try and drive me away; and I can't go, I can't, I can't! I should die if I couldn't never see his face, nor hear him speak."

In the frenzy of passion and excitement which possessed her, Lal had fallen on her knees, and clutched my coat with both her hands, looking up with an agony of supplication, as if I could decide her fate. Here was a pretty situation for Ralph Westcott, manager, to stand in!

"Lal, my dear; don't be a fool," I uttered disjointedly. "What nonsense is this? you shan't go away unless you like, but for Heaven's sake get up and behave yourself! There, that's better," I said, as she dragged herself up on to her feet, and stretched out her hand mechanically

for her milk-can, which had rolled off the verandah; "now, Lal, be a good girl, and go home, and make up your mind never to talk such nonsense again. You know Mr. Clint is a gentleman, and will be a very rich one when his father dies, and how could you for one moment suppose——"

Lal put up her hand with a pathetic gesture to stop me.

"Lord," she cried, with her bitter little laugh, which always made me angry; "it's you as is talking nonsense now! Don't you think I know he's set above us like the stars; and as if he could ever look at the likes of I! But that don't make no difference to me that I know of," she added, dropping all at once into a low tone of indescribable despair, and turning away. At this moment we both saw Clint returning with the dogs from a bathe in the river. He stopped a moment to pick a peach as he passed through old Reuben the Maori's garden, but we heard his clear voice singing: "Then tell me how to woo thee, Love, then tell me how to woo thee," as if in unconscious mockery of Lal's misery and pain. For once I felt really out of patience with Clint's beaming good-humour.

"Go home, child," I cried, sharply, and Lal vanished without another word. I walked over to the fence to meet Fairfax.

"Ralph, my boy, you look very glum! How delicious these peaches are," he added, fastening on another.

Should I tell him Lal's secret, and beg him to show the wretched girl less kindness for the future?

Whether wisely or not, I spoke.

"Fairfax, I have been talking to that poor girl Lal. She is nearly grown-up now, and I want her to go out to service."

"Whew! my prize-pupil?" cried Clint, making a long face. "Well, my dear patriarch, and what did Miss Mahaffy say to your kind proposal?"

"Well, really, Clint, it's too absurd. And yet it's a pity for the poor little soul, too. The fact is, she has such a profound adoration for you, that nothing will induce her to consent to it."

Clint looked amazed, and then annoyed.

"Alas! alack! is this to be the end of my philanthropic efforts!" he cried at last. "You don't really mean, Ralph, that she won't go because—because— Upon my word, it's too preposterous. Well, Ralph," he went on pettishly, after a pause, during which I lit my pipe, and tried to look more comfortable than I

felt, "what's a fellow to do now? Poor Lal! she has tried so awfully hard to learn and get on. Perhaps you misunderstood her?"

I shook my head.

"I don't pretend to understand these things, Clint, but it's a very real thing with her. How would it be for you to go on that visit to the Vernons you are always intending to pay? Stay away a week or two, and I'll undertake to talk to Lal, and make her take a place at Dorald's farm at Tere-weni. I know they want a dairy hand."

So Clint agreed; and as the boat was going across next day for stores, we had no time to discuss and unsettle the matter. Lal, of course, saw the boat start, for she and her brothers were always moving before anyone else on the run; and Clint waved his hand to her, and called out in his cheery way, "Good-bye, young 'uns! Stick to your books, and I'll bring over some jolly new ones when I come back." Ted halloed out, "Good-bye!" and no one but I noticed that Lal said nothing, but gazed with straining eyes after the boat, till it had disappeared round the point, and the level rays of sunrise turned the grey sea to gold.

For my own part, I turned in to breakfast with a weight off my mind, for Lal certainly was a pretty girl; and though I believed Clint to be an honest young fellow enough, still there is something flattering and pleasant in being worshipped by the only girl about the station. So, altogether, I was glad to get Fairfax safely off on a visit to a neighbouring station, where I knew the dashing Miss Vernons would soon give his thoughts a fresh direction.

CHAPTER III.

SOME weeks went by, very busy weeks, and I had begun to get used to being alone again, when I received a message from Clint that the next time the whale-boat went over to Nelson he would return by her, as a letter from his father had recalled him to England sooner than he had expected.

All the time of his absence I had seen little of Lal. She had given up coming to the station, always sending Ted instead; and I had really almost forgotten our scene in the verandah.

The day after I got Clint's message, however, I chanced to meet her as I rode home over the mud-flat. It had been a dull, foggy day, but as evening closed in

the wind began to rise fitfully, make a little sudden stir and moan, and then die away into an ominous silence. As I hurried Sprightly along I overtook Lal, walking home slowly under a load of pipis she had been collecting for supper off the rocks. At first she seemed inclined to let me pass without recognition, but when I drew up, meaning to warn her of the coming storm, she ran to my side, and laid her hand on my bridle.

"Isn't he never coming here no more, Mr. Westcott?" she asked, in such a despairing tone I could not find it in my heart to scold her.

"Why, Lal," I cried, "how ill you look. What have you done to your cheeks and eyes?"

She shook her head impatiently, and repeated her question: "Is he never coming home?"

"Well—yes, child. He's coming to-morrow; but only to say good-bye. He will be off to England, and to all his friends there, soon."

She scarcely seemed to hear the end of my speech.

"To-morrow!" she said, crouching down in a heap upon the seaweed-strewed sands, and rocking herself to and fro. "Shall I see him to-morrow?"

"Lal!" I cried impatiently. She sprang to her feet.

"Oh Mr. Westcott, don't scold me. Look here," and she pulled up her ragged sleeve to show me her arm, wasted and shrunken. "I'm dying, I think," she went on hoarsely. "I can't eat, nor sleep, nor do a half of the work I used to. I'm starving for a sight of his face; and what harm can it do him for me to be happy just one day?"

Poor Lal! I was not a particularly soft-hearted chap, but the sight of her distress gave me a queer feeling in the throat, and I rode on without speaking.

The night set in as I expected, with sharp storms of wind and rain, and by the time I had got home and done supper, there was a high sea running.

"The boat 'll never start to-morrow, Tom," I remarked, as, for company's sake, I turned into the kitchen for a smoke.

Tom looked doubtful. "I'd feel more sure o' that, sir, if old Peter had gone in her. He's a safe hand, and a'most over careful; but young Peter is rash, and won't wait for weather."

"Don't croak, Tom," I retorted; "be-

sides, the weather may mend before midnight, when they'd be starting, and then Mr. Clint will be there, and he's sure to wait if there's any danger." But as Tom still shook his head, and persisted in calling to mind all the shipwrecks he had ever been in, I gave up the argument, and went to bed, telling him to call me at six o'clock, if I wasn't stirring before.

It seemed to me that I had only just dropped asleep, when his voice at my side awoke me next morning. "Mr. Westcott, sir, it's six o'clock; and an awful nasty sea on. And I've been down twice to the beach, and can't see nothing of the boat."

"Get out, you old fool!" I roared. "You don't for one moment suppose they are anywhere but safe in Nelson Harbour?"

Tom vanished, but I got up thoroughly uncomfortable all the same, and hurried down to the beach without waiting for breakfast.

The sea looked nasty, truly. A line of white breakers thundered over the rocks, and threw their spray high into the air; a thick fog hung over Nelson, and hid the outlines of the coast, but here and there a white swirl of waters showed a dangerous spot to beware of. After a look round I was returning, when I spied a little figure sitting perched half-way up the face of the cliff in a little shelter formed by a projecting ledge.

"Lal, you silly girl, come down! There's not footing for a bird there; and what good can you do? They've never started, I'm sure. Come and have some breakfast with Tom." But I might as well have shouted at the sea-gulls, for she never moved.

When I came down again she was still there, deaf to everything except the thunder and roar of the sea. The storm seemed to increase as the morning wore away, and even Tom had come round to my opinion that young Peter never could have put out in such a sea, when we were startled by a message from Lal. She had sent Ted to say she saw something—drift-wood, it might be—still it was something.

Never, as long as I live, shall I forget the horror which clutched at our hearts, and blanched our faces, as for a moment Tom and I stared at one another while Ted breathlessly delivered the message.

Of course, we followed him at once, and

stood again peering out into the fog and spray.

"I see nothing, Lal," I shouted. "Whereabouts is it now?"

Lal for answer thrust out her long bony arm. "There 'tis!" she cried; "and 'tis—Lord have mercy!—'tis our boat!"

Not one word more did anyone say. Some half-dozen men, we stood there, helpless, watching the little spot grow and grow till we could make it out, as Lal did, to be our boat. Now she's down in the trough of the wave, now she rides on top, now she's near enough for us to make out the six dark figures in her! They are all there, thank God for that! Now we lose sight of her again, and I shout hoarsely to Lal. "All right," she pants; "they are safe past Split Rock, and they are going to beach the boat."

I clamber up on a fallen mass of rock, and can see Lal is right. They are coming in on the breakers, and will let the boat drive ashore. She will go to pieces, but it is their only chance.

We watch breathless, and no one speaks, although old Peter stands beside me, and he has two sons in peril. One tremendous wave dashes them almost within our reach—not quite—they are swept back, and the boat goes under. A moment later, and she reappears bottom-upwards among the boiling waters, and with a wild shriek Lal springs from her watching-place into the water beneath.

"Mad fool!" I cry, breaking into womanish sobs, and rushing forward with an idea of doing something—anything. But old Peter lays a shaking hand on my shoulder. "Don't 'ee throw away your life, sir. She've got him by the hair, and if anyone can live in such a sea, I'll back Lal." "But your boys, Peter?" I gasp, completely knocked out of all self-command.

"I be watching," said the old man, giving me a little shake in his suppressed excitement. "Nobody han't come up yet but Master Clint, and Lal have got he tight."

There isn't much more to tell. Out of all the six, only Fairfax was saved; though the bodies were washed ashore next day.

Lal, whose love gave her superhuman strength, had kept Clint's head away from the rock which crushed the life out of the other poor lads, and almost the next wave rolled both to our feet.

It took us a long time to unclasp Lal's hands, and I don't believe she ever knew that she really had saved the man she died for.

She was buried, when Parson Hooper came over the next Sunday, in Clint's little garden, with Peter's two sons and the other poor fellows; but it was many months before Clint could crawl out so far, or hear how his life had been saved.

THE OLD FRENCH STAGE.

LA CHAMPMESLÉ.

THE first tragic actress of any celebrity in the annals of the Théâtre Français was Madame Beauchâteau, whose dramatic career extended from 1633 to 1674; according to the testimony of her contemporaries she was remarkably handsome, and trod the stage with ease, dignity, and grace. Tallemant des Réaux alludes to her as "une sûre comédienne," but Molière in his *Impromptu de Versailles* ridicules her sing-song declamation, and more especially her want of animation and appropriate play of feature in impassioned and pathetic parts. Her immediate successor, Madame Duparc, an artist of an altogether superior stamp, after accompanying Molière during his provincial tour, returned with him to Paris, and besides creating Dorimène in *Le Mariage Forcé* and Clémène in *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, played Axiane in *Alexandre* so excellently as to excite the admiration of Racine, by whose persuasion she was induced to abandon the Palais Royal for the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where, on the production of *Andromaque* in 1667, she was selected by the poet as the personator of Hector's widow. Molière never forgave Racine for depriving him of one of his most valued colleagues, nor did the Hôtel de Bourgogne profit long by its new acquisition, Madame Duparc dying at the close of 1668.

With these two exceptions, tragedy, as far as its female representatives were concerned, appears to have been at a low ebb until the latter part of the seventeenth century; whereas comedy, supported by such efficient interpreters as Madame Molière, Madame Beauval and Made-moiselle De Brie, continued to flourish without intermission up to the death of Molière in 1673. Six years later, however, a reaction took place, and the master-pieces of Corneille and Racine, hitherto comparatively unattractive, found at length a fitting exponent in the eminent

actress whose name heads the present article.

Marie Desmarest was born at Rouen in 1641. Her father, son of a president of the parliament of Normandy, having been disinherited in consequence of his marrying contrary to the paternal will, his two children, Nicolas and our heroine, being left at his decease entirely without the means of subsistence, agreed to adopt the stage as a profession; the former proceeding with his young wife to Copenhagen, where he had been offered an engagement at the French theatre of the King of Denmark, and the latter commencing her dramatic apprenticeship in a provincial company. During her peregrinations, chance led her back to Rouen, her native place, where she shortly after married Charles Chevillet de Champmeslé, then, like herself, undergoing the ordeal of country practice preparatory to risking an appearance before a Parisian audience; and in 1669 we find the youthful couple enrolled among the actors of the Théâtre du Marais, their admission being mainly owing to the reputation already acquired by Champmeslé in the line of parts technically called "les rois." His wife, partly from natural timidity, and partly from a lack of stage experience, produced a less favourable impression, and it was generally supposed that she would never rise above mediocrity; Laroque, however, one of the actors of the theatre, thought otherwise, and affirmed that she only needed a more intimate acquaintance with the principles of her art, to equal if not excel the most celebrated of her contemporaries. In order to prove his assertion, he devoted himself assiduously to her instruction, and so well did she profit by his lessons that, before six months had elapsed, her performance of leading tragic characters had entirely converted the public to Laroque's opinion, and procured for her, together with her husband, an engagement at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

She appeared there about Easter, 1670, as Hermione in *Andromaque* with the most brilliant success; and among the many compliments paid her at the conclusion of the piece, none were more flattering than the involuntary tribute of a rival actress, Mdlle. des Céillets, who, although in the last stage of an illness which subsequently proved fatal, had expressed a wish to be present on the occasion; and recognising at once the incontestable superiority of the débutante,

exclaimed with a sigh on leaving the theatre: "Il n'y a plus de Des Œillet!"

In 1679, Champmeslé and his wife quitted the Hôtel de Bourgogne for the Rue Guénégaud, but this separation from their old colleagues lasted only until the following year, when the union of the two companies on a new basis took place. From this period until the close of her career, Madame Champmeslé's popularity, which had augmented with every successive addition to her répertoire, remained unshaken, and she was universally regarded as the sole representative of tragedy capable of adequately realising the conceptions of Racine. Her name, indeed, is inseparably connected with that of the great writer to whom she was indebted for her most signal triumphs: Bérénice, Atalide, Monime, Iphigénie en Aulide, and Phèdre, originally played by her, had little in common with such rhapsodies as Fulvie in Pradon's Régulus or the Judith of the Abbé Boyer; and if she succeeded in obtaining for these a patient hearing, what enthusiasm must she not have excited by the twofold attraction of her own genius and the melodious versification of the poet! One simple phrase in the part of Monime, "Seigneur, vous changez de visage!" is said to have been uttered by her with a peculiar significance of expression that no other actress has ever equalled; and the effect produced on the spectators by her performance of Iphigénie has been thus described by Boileau:

Jamais Iphigénie en Aulide immolée
Ne coûta tant de pleurs à la Grèce assemblée,
Que dans l'heureux spectacle à nos yeux étalé
En a fait sous son nom verser la Champmeslé.

The first interview between Racine and his fascinating interpreter is said to have dated from the evening of her appearance as Hermione—an experiment he was naturally curious to witness. During the earlier scenes of the play, he is recorded to have more than once expressed his dissatisfaction, but the impassioned energy displayed by her in the two last acts so powerfully affected him, that at the close of the tragedy he hurried to her dressing-room, and overwhelmed her with compliments and thanks. We may fairly conclude that this unexpected discovery of a highly gifted artist, on whose intelligent co-operation he could safely rely, encouraged him to new efforts, and that many of his noblest productions were partially, if not wholly, inspired by her; for at a period when the highest tragic requisites

were supposed to consist in a measured and monotonous declamation, who but Champmeslé could have successfully embodied the creations of his fancy, and rendered with equal perfection the touching pathos of Iphigénie, or the despairing majesty of Phèdre!

It is not surprising that Racine's admiration of the fair Hermione, so openly expressed on their first meeting, and subsequently heightened by frequent intercourse, should have gradually ripened into a tenderer sentiment; nor can we wonder if on her side she felt flattered by the attentions of one who, in addition to his literary celebrity, enjoyed the reputation of being counted among the handsomest men in France. Their attachment, indeed, seems by all accounts to have been mutual, at least for a time, until the lady's natural inclination to coquetry, and the marked preference evinced by her for the Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre,* abruptly terminated an intimacy which, according to the testimony of Boileau and Madame de Sévigné, had become the talk of the town. "Racine," says the latter, "writes pieces for Champmeslé, more with a view to please her than for the sake of posterity; when he is older and no longer in love, it will be quite another thing." Later still, her son, Charles de Sévigné, having in his turn been subjugated by the charms of the siren, the lively marquise complaisantly alludes to the latter as her "daughter-in-law." That she thought highly of her talent, the following extracts from her letters will show. "Talking of the theatre, I send you Bajazet; if at the same time I could send you Champmeslé, you would find the piece excellent; without her it loses half its value." "We have seen Bajazet; my daughter-in-law seems to me to be the most marvellous actress I ever saw." "Champmeslé is something so extraordinary, that in your whole life you have seen nothing like her; people go to the theatre for her, not for what she plays. I went to see Ariane solely on her account; the piece is insipid and the actors are detestable, but when she appears there is a murmur of delight, everyone is enchanted, and the whole house weeps at her despair!"

Another of her constant admirers was La Fontaine, who dedicated to her his poetic tale of Belphegor, probably the most

* This episode in the actress's life gave rise to the not over witty saying that "le tonnerre l'avait déracinée."

flattering homage she ever received. He says :

Nos noms unis perceront l'onde noire ;
 Vous régnerez longtemps dans la mémoire,
 Après avoir régné jusques ici
 Dans les esprits et dans les cœurs aussi.
 Qui ne connaît l'inimitable actrice
 Représentant ou Phèdre, ou Bérénice,
 Chimène en pleurs, ou Camille en fureur ?
 Est-il quelqu'un que votre voix n'enchanter,
 S'en trouve-t-il une autre aussi touchante,
 Une autre enfin allant si droit au cœur ?
 N'attendez pas que je fasse l'éloge
 De ce qu'en vous on trouve de parfait ;
 Comme il n'est point de grâce qui n'y loge,
 Ce serait trop ; je n'aurais jamais fait.

When absent from Paris, he corresponded frequently with her, but only one of his letters has been preserved, dated from the Château Thierry in 1678. "The heat," he writes, "and the loss of your society makes us all feel insupportably dull. As far as you are concerned, I need not ask you how you are amusing yourself ; I can see it from here. You are the centre of attraction from morning to night, and are perpetually ravaging the hearts of fresh victims. Everything, in short, belongs either to the King of France or to Madame Champmeslé."

It does not appear that, apart from her artistic qualities, the intellectual capacity of this celebrated actress was in any way remarkable ; her education had been almost entirely neglected, and if we may judge from an anecdote current at the time, she must have been more than ordinarily naïve. She is reported to have asked Racine from what source he had taken the subject of *Athalie*, and on his replying from the Old Testament ; "The Old Testament !" she exclaimed in a tone of surprise, "I thought somebody had written a new one !" She had, however, acquired a certain familiarity with the usages of society which, combined with a graceful piquancy and a peculiar charm of manner, rendered her as attractive in private life as she was on the stage. Without being strictly beautiful, for she had small eyes and a sallow complexion, the expression of her countenance was extremely pleasing ; in stature she was tall and well-proportioned, and admirably fitted to represent the heroines of the classic drama. But the real secret of her influence over the spectators consisted in a voice of extraordinary compass and touching sweetness, which she managed with such infinite skill as to vary its inflections according to the impulse of the moment, now drawing tears from every eye by its melodious tenderness, now bursting into a whirlwind

of passion so marvellously sonorous, that its accents were audible in the adjoining Café Procope. For, it must be remembered that, at the period alluded to, the fashion of declaiming verse like the recitative of an opera was still in vogue, and continued to obtain until the early part of the following century, when a more natural way of speaking was first adopted by Adrienne Lecouvreur. As the author of *Les Entretiens Galants*, published in 1682, justly remarks : "Tragedy, as recited by our actors, is merely a species of singing, and you will own that Champmeslé would scarcely please you as much as she does, if her voice were less agreeable. She modulates it, however, so exquisitely, and so eloquent are its intonations, that whatever passion she desires to simulate appears to come direct from her heart." It must have been no easy task to express in this sort of sing-song the ravings of Oreste and the anguish of Camille ; and the famous monologue of *Théramène* in *Phèdre* must have sorely tried the patience of the listeners ; but this apparent incongruity presented no difficulty to Madame Champmeslé, for we are assured that, so genuine was her emotion, and so irresistible the effect of her pathetic declamation, not even the most stoical could avoid being moved by it. On the other hand, she was deplorably weak in comedy, and indeed hardly ever attempted it, one or two unsuccessful essays in the ancient répertoire having been sufficient to discourage her ; nor during the whole of her career have we been able to discover a single comic part originally created by her.

Towards the end of 1684 her brother Nicolas, tired of his protracted sojourn at Copenhagen and anxious to return to Paris, solicited her to obtain for him from Louis the Fourteenth the necessary permission to appear at the Théâtre Français ; and, his reception without preparatory début having been accorded by special favour, joined the company early in the following year. He proved a great acquisition to the theatre in the very elastic line of parts called "*les paysans*," and many of Dancourt's comedies were written expressly for him ; his daughter, Charlotte Desmares, became afterwards (from 1699 to 1721) one of the most accomplished soubrettes of the Comédie Française.

It is generally asserted that no authentic portrait exists of Madame Champmeslé. There is extant an engraving by Lefèvre, after a miniature formerly belonging to

M. de la Mésengère, bearing her name, but in no respect answering the description given of her by contemporary writers; nor, as far as our recollection serves us, is she included in the curious pictorial gallery adorning the private foyer of the Théâtre Français. M. Arsène Houssaye, however, in his *Princesses de Comédie et Déesses d'Opéra*, distinctly mentions a likeness of her in his possession, representing "une figure noble, fière et fine;" and it seems moreover improbable that at a time when Mignard and Rigaud flourished, neither of them should have handed down to posterity the features of so remarkable a model.

In December, 1697, after a few performances of *Iphigénie* in the *Oreste et Pylade* of Lagrange Chancel—the notorious author of the libels against the regent—she was compelled by the failing state of her health to retire, temporarily, as she thought, from the stage, and endeavour to recruit her strength at a country house belonging to her at Anteuil. There the unfavourable symptoms gradually increased, and before many weeks had elapsed, all hopes of her ultimate recovery were at an end. Racine, in his letters to his son, affirms that, though greatly terrified by the approach of death, she was even more alarmed at the idea of formally renouncing her profession, declaring her wish to die as she had lived—an actress. The Curé of Saint Sulpice, however, anxious to secure so important a convert, prevailed upon her to submit; and having been reconciled to the church, she expired May 15th, 1698, in her fifty-seventh year. Racine adds that in her last moments, while expressing sincere repentance for her past life, she owned that, above all, she was "sorry to die."

Her husband, with whom, notwithstanding her frequent infidelities, she appears to have lived on excellent terms, survived her three years, and the following singular anecdote referring to his death is related by the commentator of Boileau's works. In the night of August 20th, 1701, he dreamt that he saw his mother and his wife together, and that the latter beckoned to him with her finger. Strongly impressed with the conviction that the visit was intended as a warning, he went next morning to the church of the Cordeliers, and gave a thirty-sous piece to the sacristan, requesting him to have a mass said for his mother, and another for his wife. On the sacristan's offering to return him the

remaining ten sous, he refused to receive them, saying that the third mass should be for himself, and that he would stay and hear it. When it was over, he repaired to the theatre, and some of the actors not having arrived, seated himself on a bench in front of a cabaret, called *L'Alliance*, and conversed with his comrades as they came up, reminding one of them, Sallé, that he had promised to dine with him that day. Suddenly he put his hand to his head, and without uttering another word fell forward on his face; when Desmares and others lifted him from the ground, he was dead!

GEORGIE'S WOOR.

A STORY IN THIRTEEN CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER VII.

BEDINGFIELD HARPER was one of those social quicksands that present a smooth and tempting surface to the eye, and lure the unwary to certain destruction. Like the quicksand, after engulfing others in ruin, he looked still unchanged, still unruffled, and never seemed to be the worse himself for the social eclipse of those he led into paths that were anything but "paths of peace."

If a new commercial bubble was started, and by some quiet arrangement Bedingfield Harper received a snug premium on every thousand invested by those who were guided by his candid advice to these investments—who was the wiser?

In our great centres of commerce this sort of charlatanry goes on daily, and is known by business men to exist, though in nine cases out of ten it would be difficult to bring such transactions home to any particular individual.

Harper called himself a London stockbroker, and was essentially a City man; a City man who made many acquaintances among the outer fringe of the aristocracy, and dined occasionally in Belgravia. He had a fair, open countenance, bold blue eyes, and bushy whiskers, and a sort of you-may-trust-me manner that was very taking. There was not a single landmark either in look or manner to warn the unwary individual who, not much of a business man himself, had a few thousands to invest, and was thankful to Providence for putting in his way such a genial, straightforward fellow as the good-looking stockbroker. If his general costume, and his various articles of jewellery, was a thought too loud to be

"good form" in Pall Mall or St. James's Street, why, of course, these little peculiarities are to be expected in "City men;" and then, "Harper was such a good fellow!"

There is no reputation in the world so advantageous to a man as that of being "a good fellow;" no cloak under which he may be such a thoroughly bad fellow. When you come to try and boil down this reputation, and see what ingredients it is composed of, the result is unsatisfactory to a degree; and you find that the structure rests upon a remarkably flimsy foundation. But, in spite of this, the man is considered a "good fellow," and he trades upon it.

Thus the victims of Bedingfield Harper were so unwilling to distrust him, that even when blank despair stared in their pale faces and claimed them for its own, they had been known to make every conceivable excuse for the ignis fatuus that had led them into the quagmire, and express their firm conviction that "Harper had done his best," and felt the painfulness of their position "as much as they did themselves."

He had a habit of addressing a man whom he was leading into slippery places as "My dear fellow;" and, Pecksniff-like, had a weak place in his heart for any dear orphan or defenceless widow with a small property to invest.

A loyal-hearted, simple, honest sailor like Captain Hammond was just the man to fall into the toils of a spider so skilled in weaving webs for unwary flies; and very shortly after an unhappy chance had brought him across the stockbroker's path, the whole management of his affairs was in that individual's hands. If the newly-started company that was to have doubled and trebled the few thousand pounds, which, added to his half-pay, made Captain Hammond a comparatively rich man, did not do so, but, on the contrary, swallowed them up as easily and completely as the boa-constrictor at the Zoological Gardens bolts an innocent, mild-faced rabbit, who so inconsolable at the unfortunate turn of affairs as Bedingfield Harper?

A week after Captain Hammond's funeral, he appeared at Beach House, having been quite unable, so he assured Miss Hammond, to refrain from taking the long journey from London, to express to her in person his sympathy and sorrow in the sad bereavement she had sustained.

Georgie had been at the seaside with

the love-birds at the time of her father's acquaintance with Mr. Harper, and was surprised to hear that gentleman speak in such familiar and warm terms of his "poor friend;" and there was an open admiration of herself in his manner which hurt her pride, as the touch of a hand makes the graceful acacia shrink.

Truth to tell, Mr. Harper was contrasting in his own mind the slight yet rounded figure, the sad, sweet eyes, and delicate lips before him, with the too substantial charms of his liege lady, a woman many years his senior, and married for the sake of certain moneys invested in the Funds, his own funds having been in a very low condition at the time. "It is to me a painful duty," he said, rubbing his large white hands slowly together, and speaking in a mysterious and sympathetic voice—"indeed, I may say one of the most painful duties I have ever been called upon to perform—to tell you, Miss Hammond—a hem!—that your father's affairs are in a very, a ve—ry unsatisfactory state."

"She's a plucky one!" he thought to himself, as he saw a quiver pass across her face, and her hand grasp the table by which she sat.

"I knew," she said, after a moment's silence, "that you had the management of papa's business matters, and I fear—I sadly fear—that the anxiety of knowing that things were going wrong—"

"Pardon me, Miss Hammond," said her visitor, rising, and assuming an air of righteous candour. "You say I had the management of my lamented friend's affairs. Now, above all things, I like to be accurate: the late Captain Hammond"—oh, how his hearer quivered at these words!—"came to me, advised to do so by a friend, and consulted me as to the investment of certain sums left to him, as I understood, by an uncle who had lived to a great age; and, being something of a miser, hoarded, without judiciously investing his money. Permit me to say, your father was not as cautious as I could have wished. I said to him: 'This scheme is a newly-started affair; I know little or nothing of it. The interest is good, I may say tempting; but—'"

"Mr. Harper," said Georgie, interrupting him, while a rich flood of crimson dyed her hitherto pale cheek, "I will never hear from any human being one breath against my dearest father. Whatever he did was done for—for our sakes." Here the poor child had hard work to keep back a

sob—for oh, the bitterness of the thought that he was here no longer to love and watch over his children!

"When I said just now," she continued, recovering herself, "that you had the management of papa's affairs, I only quoted his own words to me some time ago. That he said so is enough to make it for me a certain fact—and one which no explaining away could in the smallest degree alter. I do not wish to seem ungrateful for your kindness in coming so far to explain my position to me."

"Oh Miss Hammond, there is no gratitude needed," said the would-be charming stockbroker; "a journey which has procured me the pleasure——"

Georgie did not speak, only looked at him; but that look stopped his fluent flow of words as surely as though someone had clapped a handkerchief over his mouth.

"Explain to me, if you please, Mr. Harper, the exact position in which our affairs now stand—plainly and straightforwardly, if you please—so that I may learn what steps it will be right for me to take."

He was like a whipped hound before the girl's maidenly dignity. He hastened to lay aside his complimentary manner—the manner that others less fastidious than Georgie Hammond had pronounced "so charming"—and became at once simply a business man, engaged in a business interview.

Poor Georgie! she needed all her courage before that interview was over; and when Bedingfield Harper had hurried away to catch the last train from Collingford, and the twins came downstairs clamouring for a story to be told by the firelight, she held Tricksy very close in her arms, and made Jack nestle against her knee, and was silent for a long while, till Tricksy, feeling something hot fall upon her face, put up her hand, and said:

"Oh Jack, sissy's c'ying—c'ying ever so!"

"My darlings! my darlings!" said poor sister, and kissed them through her tears, "I cannot tell you a story to-night!"

Georgie was realising the bitterness of her sorrow—realising the one great, cruel truth that she stood alone in the world, and that where hitherto a loving hand had guided her, a loving arm been ever ready to shield her from the wind of heaven lest it might "visit her cheek too roughly," that fond protection was gone, and the

world, with all the possibilities of suffering it contained, had to be faced—alone!

"Mrs. Hainsleigh!" said the housemaid, flinging open the door, and so impressed with the dignity and importance of the mistress of Fern Leigh that she put an extra amount of aspiration on the superfluous "h."

Then the firelight glinted on the costly velvet Mrs. Ainsleigh wore, and showed Georgie a gentle, sympathetic face, and two hands outstretched in a warm, almost tender, greeting.

Which of us has not, at one time or other of our lives, lived through days, or weeks, or months, with an undercurrent, silent yet powerful, unconsciously perhaps to ourselves, underlying every word and act—something that must be set aside, put out of our immediate sight by the force of external circumstances around us—and yet that in our moments of inaction and rest makes itself felt as one of the threads in the cord of life that fate is spinning for us?

It had been so with Georgie. When Douglas Ainsleigh left Sheeling so abruptly—left her in her day of sorrow and pain—she hid deep down in her heart the thoughts and the hopes that had been timid only because they dared not be tender, the sweet, shy joy that had been a new experience in her life, that had held fond greetings, and partings that were a "pleasing pain." The agony of dread, and then the loss of the one who had been such a close companion and loving protector, who had been not only father, but friend, came between her heart and the dawn of love, as a heavy storm-cloud hides the morning sun from the world, and overshadows the glory of his rising.

But now—now that Mrs. Ainsleigh stood beside her, and held her hands so tenderly, with a graceful refinement expressing sympathy more by looks than words—the buried thoughts of the past arose, the thought of Douglas Ainsleigh, the man who had taught her to listen for the sound of his footstep, and her heart to flutter when at last she heard it, with a gladness that was half fear. She thought of the hasty parting, and the grey eyes, generally so keen, softened into anxious, loving pity as they lingered on her face; and, perhaps unconsciously to herself, that strange likeness of voice and manner which we may almost always notice among members of the same family, even when no

personal resemblance can be traced, helped to render more vivid to Georgie the thought of Mrs. Ainsleigh's son.

"I fear it is very late for me to have ventured to call upon you," said the visitor, as she took a seat by the fire; "but I only reached Fern Leigh a couple of hours ago."

"I did not know you were away," replied Georgie, with a little sigh of relief at finding she had not been so much forgotten as she thought.

Then came explanations as to the note which had never reached its destination; and Tricky and Jack were kissed and talked to before they departed under the wing of Nurse Hughes.

By thus avoiding all allusion at first to the bitter loss Georgie had sustained since they last met, Mrs. Ainsleigh gave her time to overcome the nervousness we all feel at meeting those who see us newly in our day of sorrow; but when the children were gone, and they two sat together by the cheery firelight, then, with infinite gentleness, she touched upon the events of the past month—so gently, indeed, that for the first time since Captain Hammond's death something like comfort gathered about Georgie's heart.

"You must let me come and see you very often; and come to Fern Leigh, and bring those little ones with you. It is not good for you, my dear, to stay too much alone; and until you have formed some plans for the future, you must let me tyrannise over you, and fancy that I am quite an old friend."

"You are very good," returned Georgie, drawing a deep breath, as we do when we are about to plunge into something we know will hurt very much, and which there is no way out of; "but my plans are already made. It is hard for me to have to speak of all this, Mrs. Ainsleigh, but I must try and explain it all to you. My dearest father was very, very unfortunate just before he died, and, all through trying to do his best for us whom he loved, he lost everything he had. I don't mean just a few hundred pounds, but all—everything. And the worst of it is, that I am afraid—oh no, not afraid only, but I know—his fears for us—broke his heart . . ."

Here the girl had to stop a moment; and her companion was silent too.

"Mr. Harper, the man who managed papa's affairs for him, has been to see me, and he tells me there is nothing left; and,

worse than this, there are some liabilities still that papa would have had to pay, and that of course must be paid as quickly as I can manage it. We bought the furniture of this house when we came at a valuation, and I should think there can be no difficulty in selling it for the same again?"

Georgie looked enquiringly at her visitor as she said this, and Mrs. Ainsleigh felt a thrill of pity for the slight, girlish creature so bravely trying to stand up and face the difficulties of her position. Other thoughts, too, passed through her mind, and pained her still more deeply—thoughts against which her better nature rebelled, and yet which, in spite of herself, chilled her manner towards Georgie as an easterly breeze chills a warm summer's day.

"Have you no one who can take these matters in hand, and act for you?" she said, flicking the fur of her mantle with one dainty glove, and developing altogether a strange restlessness of manner alien to her usual sauvity of demeanour.

"No," replied Georgie, sensitively conscious of some change of atmosphere, yet at a loss to understand in what it consisted. "My mother was an only child, and so was papa; so we have fewer relatives than most people. I think it was kind of Mr. Harper to come such a long distance to see me and explain it all. He had written just before—just before my great sorrow, and, receiving no answer, thought it best to come. He had not chanced to see, so he said, the—the reason of this silence."

Another pause here, for the brave girl was determined not to break down.

"If I can pay off these liabilities of which Mr. Harper spoke, then I can set myself to work for us all; and that is what I should like to ask your help in, Mrs. Ainsleigh."

The grey glove still passed over and over the soft fur, the firelight shone on the braids of snow-white hair, but the dark eyes were not as calm and sweet as they were wont to be.

"Surely there can be no need for you to work," she said uneasily. "After serving his country for so many years, it is hardly likely your father's children can be left without some provision, some pension or other?"

And Mrs. Ainsleigh was right in saying that such a thing seems almost beyond belief, that a man gives the best years of his life, risks that life if need be in the service of his country, and then, when he has borne "the burden and heat

of the day," and death claims him, his grateful country makes no provision for the helpless children he may leave behind him. But such is the state of matters; and in this the navy is worse off than the army—which, by-the-way, is saying a good deal, when we think of the miserable pittance an officer's widow and children receive, even when climate and hard work have helped to make them desolate and perhaps homeless in the world.

When a naval officer dies on half-pay, his children may receive some small amount of assistance, provided due representation be made that the case is a really urgent one. In fact, not only must pride be brought low, but it must actually be made to bite the dust—to tear aside the covering that delicacy prompts us all to wrap round our poverty, and, like the beggars in the streets of a continental town, expose our sores and our suffering, in order that a galling charity may be doled out with niggard hand.

All this poor Georgie knew, from the case of a friend in which her father had, in days past, interested himself; and all this she explained to Mrs. Ainsleigh, her colour coming and going, her eyes sparkling with the light of a pride vehement enough to dry up for a time the passionate tears of a sorrow whose depths she alone could fathom.

"Of course," she said, "if it comes to that, that there should be a need for help to my darlings, I must write to some of papa's old friends in the navy and see what can be done; but not till I have tried—not till I have tried very hard indeed. I think my strength lies in my fingers," she went on, with a sad smile, holding out her soft white hands to the fire, "and that is how you can help me if you will, Mrs. Ainsleigh. Papa was so proud of my playing, you know, and always gave me the best instruction and masters, that I think I ought to be able to get on as a music-mistress in a town

like Collingford, and my idea is to go into cheap lodgings there and try to get pupils——"

Georgie stopped short, for something in Mrs. Ainsleigh's face made her fear that she had been mistaken in asking for help in this wonderfully wise plan of hers.

"You see, I thought you must know people there, and that a word from you would——" she stammered.

Mrs. Ainsleigh rose, seemingly more agitated than the occasion could well account for.

"I am very sorry for all this. I know many people in the neighbourhood of Collingford. I will do all I can."

Then she hesitated a moment, and said, without looking at the girl who stood before her, very pale, and troubled-looking:

"My son was most anxious about your poor father when he left Fern Leigh; he feels deeply for your loss, Miss Hammond."

But to this Georgie made no reply.

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DR. CARRICK.

BY M. E. BRADDON.

CHAPTER I. THE DOCTOR.

DR. CARRICK was a man of genius whose life had been a failure. On his five-and-fortieth birthday he looked back, with a gloomy gaze, upon a career that had not been brightened by one solitary success. Most men have their intervals of good luck, but in the desert of this man's life there had been no green spot. People spoke well of him, lauded him for his high principles and rugged honesty, but they began to call him poor Carrick. That was bitter.

He had practised as a physician in many places. First in a quiet country town, where he kept his gig, and pinched himself in order to feed his horse, and where he simulated success by the respectability of his appearance and surroundings. But the cost of his house and servants, his horse and gig, sleek broad-cloth and fine linen, crushed him. He succumbed under the severe proprieties of provincial life, and went to London, thinking to find there a wider field for his abilities.

He found the field wide enough, so wide indeed that nobody seemed aware of his existence. If he had been a clever quack who made bread pills, he might have advertised his way to fortune; but he was only a man who had adopted a difficult profession from sheer love of science, and

who asked for nothing better than to be able to live by his talent, and to go on extending his experience and adding to his knowledge.

Dr. Carrick tried London, from the western suburbs to the heights of Pentonville, from Bloomsbury to Blackfriars, from Lambeth to Bow, and he left it, after fifteen weary years, as poor a man as when he entered that stony wilderness, save for a legacy of three hundred and forty pounds from an octogenarian great-aunt, whose very existence he had forgotten till this godsend dropped into his lap.

His professional labours in the metropolis had given him just a bare livelihood. He was a man of exceptional temperance and self-denial, and could live upon a pittance which, for a less Spartan mind, would have meant starvation. He left London without a debt, and with a decent coat on his back; and perhaps the monster city, beneath whose feet many a pearl is flung to be trampled into the mire, has seldom cast out of its bosom, unknown and unvalued, a cleverer man than Theodore Carrick.

That legacy—the first boon which fortune had ever bestowed upon him—was a turning-point in Dr. Carrick's life. It can hardly be said to have made him richer, for, with the three hundred and forty pounds, his great-aunt had left him something else—a distant cousin of two-and-twenty, a gentle, patient, willing girl, with a pale placid face, dark hazel eyes, and dark brown hair, that had a tinge of

ruddy gold in the sunshine. This fourth or fifth cousin of the doctor's was one of those waifs, which the sea of life is always throwing up on the bleak shores of adversity. No shipwrecked princess in sweet Shakespearian story, was ever more helpless and alone than Hester Rushton at the beginning of life. Old Mrs. Hedger, hearing of the untimely end of the girl's parents, had taken her at the age of twelve, as companion, protégée, drudge, and victim. As a child, Hester had endured the old lady's tempers with unvarying patience; as a girl she had waited upon her, and nursed her with unfailing care. But she never learned to flatter or to fawn, so Mrs. Hedger left her old servant Betty a thousand pounds, and Hester only a hundred.

When Dr. Carrick went down to the little Hertfordshire village to attend his aunt's funeral, in the character of a grateful legatee, he found Hester Rushton among the other goods and chattels in the house of death, and with very little more idea as to her future destiny than the chairs and tables, which were to be sold by the auctioneer on the following Monday.

"And what are you going to do, Miss Rushton?" asked Dr. Carrick, when the funeral was over.

"I don't know," said Hester simply.

And then the tears came into her eyes at the thought of her loneliness. The old lady had never been particularly kind to her, but she had given her lodging, and food, and raiment; and life, though joyless, had been sheltered from the bleak winds of misfortune.

"I suppose I shall go and live—some—where," said Hester vaguely. "I can get a room in the village for four shillings a week, and perhaps I might get some children to teach—very little children, who would not want to learn much."

"I think you had much better come and live with me," said Dr. Carrick. "I am going to buy a country practice, somewhere in the West of England, where living is cheap; you can come and keep house for me."

Hester accepted the offer as frankly as it was made.

"Do you really think I could be useful to you?" she asked. "I used to look after the house, and indeed do a good deal of the house-work for aunt Hedger, but, I shouldn't like to be a burden to you," concluded Hester, very seriously. She

was a conscientious little thing, and had never had a selfish thought in her life.

The idea that it might not be strictly correct, or in accordance with the laws of society, that a young lady of two-and-twenty should keep house for a gentleman of five-and-forty, never entered her mind. Her only anxiety was not to impose upon her cousin Carrick's goodness.

"You will not be a burden to me," answered Dr. Carrick. "Poor as I am, I have always been cheated by my servants. Yes, even when I have been so low in the world as to have nobody but a charwoman, that charwoman has stolen my coals, and taken toll of my tea and sugar. You will save me more than you will cost me."

So it came to pass that Dr. Carrick gave a hundred and fifty pounds for a practice in a Cornish village, within half-a-dozen miles of Penzance, and set up house-keeping in a roomy old house, on a hill above the broad Atlantic; a house whose windows looked down upon a wild rock-bound shore, where the wide-winged cormorants perched upon the craggy pinnacles of serpentine, and where the sea in sunny weather wore the changeful colours of a dolphin's back.

CHAPTER II. HIS PATIENT.

FOR the first three years, Dr. Carrick's life at the village of St. Hildred was, like all that had gone before it, a hard struggle for the bare necessities of existence. Provisions were cheap at St. Hildred, and it was the fashion to live simply, or else in those first years the doctor could hardly have lived at all. He soon won for himself a reputation for skill in his profession, and people believed in that grave earnest manner of his, the dark deep-set eyes, pale passionless face, and high bald brow. He was more respected than liked by the lower orders, while he was too grave and wise for the fox-hunting squires and their homely wives; but, happily, all agreed in believing him clever, so that by the end of those probationary years, he had acquired a practice which just enabled him to maintain his small household decently, keep his horse, and indulge himself with a new suit of clothes once a year.

This was not much to have gained at the end of eight-and-twenty years of toil and study, and anyone who looked in the doctor's face, could see there the stamp of a disappointed life. His spirits had sunk into a settled melancholy, from which he rarely took the trouble to rouse himself.

In his professional work his manner was quick, decisive, trenchant; at home he gave himself up to thought and study.

Hester—or Hettie as she was more familiarly called—had proved a domestic treasure. She kept the big, rambling old house as neat as a new pin, with only the aid of a ruddy-cheeked buxom Cornish girl, whose wages were five pounds a year. She had brightened up the old furniture—left by the doctor's predecessor, and bought cheap by the doctor—in such a marvellous way, that the clumsy old chairs and tables looked almost handsome. The bedrooms, with their low ceilings, wide fireplaces, huge four-post bedsteads, and dark damask draperies, had a gloom which even her art could not dispel; and there were abiding shadows on the darksome old staircase, and in the long narrow corridors, that suggested ghostly visitors. Indeed, it was because the house had long enjoyed the reputation of being haunted, that the doctor had taken it. The Cornish mind was averse from ghosts, so the rent of St. Hildred House was almost ridiculously small.

One bleak March evening, Dr. Carrick was summoned to a patient at a distance. The night was wild and rough for a long ride upon a lonely road, and the doctor was tired after his day's work; but the words Tregonnell Manor, pronounced by the rosy-faced maid-of-all-work, acted like a charm. He started up from his comfortable armchair, flung his book aside, and went out into the dimly-lighted hall. The door was open, and a man on horseback was waiting in front of it.

"Has Mr. Tregonnell come back to the manor?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir. Master came home this morning. He's not been well for some time—a nasty low fever hanging about him—but he kept out with his yacht as long as he could, coasting about Spain and the south of France. Yesterday we put in at Plymouth, and came home early this morning by the night coach. He's looking right-down bad, and he sent me to ask you to ride over."

"I'll come directly. Is there a medicine-chest at Tregonnell?"

"There be a chest, I know; but I can't say as there's anything in it."

"I'd better bring what I'm likely to want. I'll go and saddle my horse."

Throughout his residence at St. Hildred, the doctor had groomed his horse. There

was no horse better groomed or better fed in the neighbourhood.

Tregonnell Manor was the most important place between the Land's End and the Lizard; a good old house of the Elizabethan period, with a fine estate attached to it. The Tregonnells, once a large family, had dwindled down to a single descendant, a bachelor of three-and-thirty, who was rumoured to have lived a wild life in London and other great cities, to have made shipwreck of a fine constitution, and to be not altogether right in his mind. His appearances at Tregonnell Manor were fitful and unexpected. He never stayed there long, and he never seemed to know what to do with his life when he was there. He avoided all society, and his only pleasure appeared to be in yachting. He was an excellent sailor, commanded his own yacht, and went everywhere, from the Start Point to the Black Sea.

Dr. Carrick had heard a great deal about this Squire Tregonnell—the last of the good old Tregonnell race—men who had worn sword and gown, and had played their part in every great struggle, from the Wars of the Roses to the Battle of the Boyne. He knew that Eustace Tregonnell was one of the richest men in this part of the country. A valuable patient for a struggling physician, assuredly.

The stable clock at Tregonnell Manor was striking ten, as the doctor and the groom rode in at the open gate between tall stone pillars crowned with the Tregonnell escutcheon. By the half light of a waning moon, drifting in a sea of clouds, the grounds of the manor-house looked gloomy and unbeautiful, the house itself sombre and uninviting. Within, all had the same air of abiding gloom. The dark oak walls and old pictures, the rusty armour, the low ceilings, and deep-set doors were unbrightened by any of the signs of occupation or family life. Tregonnell Manor looked what it was, the house of a man who had never found, or hoped to find, happiness in his home. An old servant opened a door and ushered the doctor into a large room, lined with books. Mr. Tregonnell sat by the wide hearth, where the neglected logs were dropping into gray ash, a small table with a reading-lamp by his side. This lamp was the only light in the room. It illuminated the table and a narrow circle round it, and left all else in deep shadow.

"Good evening, doctor," said Mr. Tre-

gonnell, pleasantly enough, shutting his book, and motioning the doctor to a chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

The face which he turned to Dr. Carrick was a remarkable and an interesting one. Ruins are always interesting; and this face was the ruin of one of the handsomest faces Dr. Carrick had ever seen. A face pale as marble, eyes of that dark gray which looks black, a broad brow, whose whiteness was made more striking by the blackness of the thick short hair that framed it, features well and firmly carved, and about all an expression of intense melancholy—that utter weariness of life, which is more difficult to cure than any other form of depression. Premature lines marked the broad brow, the cheeks were hollow, the eyes wan and haggard. If this man were indeed the last and sole representative of the Tregonnell race, that race seemed in sore danger of extinction.

Dr. Carrick felt his new patient's pulse, and looked at him thoughtfully for a minute or so, in the vivid light of the reading-lamp.

He made none of the stereotyped enquiries.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked bluntly. "You know much better than I can tell you."

"A restlessness that impels me to be continually shifting the scene of my life; an indescribable disgust at everything, and a hatred of all places; a feeling that I have lived too long, and yet that I don't quite want to die."

"You have made a mistake common to young men who have fine constitutions and fine fortunes. You have fancied both inexhaustible."

"I have been extravagant, but I have hardly spent my income," answered Mr. Tregonnell frankly; "but I daresay I have used my constitution rather badly. I had a disappointment early in life—I daresay you have heard the story. I wanted to marry a woman whom my father was pleased to call my inferior, though she was as much my superior then as a woman, as she is now as a sinless soul in paradise. He gave me a yacht, for which I had been longing, and sent me abroad to cure myself of my fancy. I was happy enough in the bustle and variety of my life, thinking that things would work round in time, and that I should come home and find my darling true to me, and my father more indulgent. I wrote to her from every port, and in every letter told her the same

story. We had only to be true to each other, and to wait for happier days. I should wait, if need were, till my hair grew gray. I was away a year, and my life during all that time was such a wandering one, that it was no surprise to me to find my letters unanswered. When I came back, I found a grave, and discovered later, that my sweet girl had been sent to drudge as an articulated pupil in a school at Exeter. Not one of my letters had been given to her. They would only have unsettled her, her wicked old hag of a grandmother told me. I knew afterwards, that my father had bought her people over to his interests. She had no mother. Her father was a weak-minded sot; her grandmother a greedy time-serving old harridan. Between them they killed her, and broke my heart. That was the beginning of my wild career, Dr. Carrick. Not a very cheerful one, was it?"

"A common story, I fear."

"Yes; wrecked and ruined lives are common enough, I daresay. They fill the Haymarket, and keep gambling-houses going, and swell the excise. I went to London after my father's death, and from London to Paris, and from Paris to Vienna. There is very little wildness or wickedness in those three cities, that I could not enlighten you about. A man cannot touch pitch without defilement. I didn't steep myself to the lips in pitch, or wallow in it, and enjoy it as some men do; but I touched it, and the taint cleaves to me. There is nothing in this world that men call pleasure, which has the faintest charm for me. My nights are restless, and troubled with feverish dreams. And sometimes—sometimes—I start up with a sudden thrill of horror going through me like an arrow, and feel as if the hair of my head were lifted up, like Job's, at a vision of hideous fear."

"What is it you fear?"

"Madness," answered Eustace Tregonnell, in a half-whisper. "It has appeared more than once in my family. My grandfather died mad. Sometimes I fancy that I can feel it coming. It has seemed near at hand, even. I have looked in the glass, started at my haggard face, hardly recognising myself, and have cried out involuntarily: 'That is the face of a madman!'"

"A not unnatural result of sleepless and troubled nights," answered the doctor quietly. "Do you know that a week's insomnia—one little week absolutely without sleep—has been known to result in

temporary lunacy? That was an extreme case, of course; but the man who can't sleep comfortably is always in a bad way. You must have refreshing sleep, Mr. Tregonnell, or your fears may be realised."

"Where are the drugs that will give it me? I have tried them all. The sole effect of opiates is to send me into a fever, and to make me twice as wakeful as I am without them."

"I should not recommend opiates in your case."

"What would you recommend then?"

"Mesmerism."

Mr. Tregonnell smiled, a smile at once contemptuous and impatient.

"I sent for a physician, whose sagacity I have heard highly lauded. I did not expect to meet——"

"A quack," said Dr. Carrick. "Yes, I know that mesmerism ranks with table-turning and other juggleries. A striking proof of the ignorance of the popular mind upon all scientific questions outside the narrow range of old-established orthodoxy."

And then Dr. Carrick went on to discourse eloquently upon mesmerism as a curative agent. He told Mr. Tregonnell about Dr. Esdaile's experiments in the native hospital in Calcutta; he argued warmly in favour of an influence which was evidently with him a favourite subject of study.

"Have you tried this wonderful agent upon any of your Cornish patients?" asked Mr. Tregonnell.

"I am not such a fool. A century ago they would have punished mesmerism under the head of witchcraft, to-day they would scout it as quackery. I talk freely to you, because I take you for a reasonable and enlightened being."

"Do you think I am a subject for mesmerism?"

"I know you are, and an excellent one."

"Mesmerise me, then," said Mr. Tregonnell quietly, throwing himself back in his chair, and fixing his dark haggard eyes upon the doctor.

"In this house? Impossible! I should throw you into a sleep which would last for hours; a sleep of deepest unconsciousness, from which the loudest noises would not awaken you; a sleep in which you would be even insensible to pain. Your servants would take alarm. My coming and going might seem strange; and, in short, if I am to cure you by means of mesmerism, as I know I can—yes, tame that wild fever of your blood, reduce that

unhealthy restlessness to placid repose, banish fears which are not wholly groundless; in a word, give you that which ancient philosophy counted as the highest good, a sane mind in a sound body—if I am to do all this, Mr. Tregonnell, I must have the case in my own hands. I must have you under my care by day and night. My house is large and commodious. You must come and live with me."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Tregonnell. "Is not that rather like going into a private lunatic asylum?"

"My house is not registered as an asylum, and I never had a lunatic in my care. No, Mr. Tregonnell; you will be farther from lunacy under my roof than you are here, eating your heart out by this dismal fireside."

"Yes, it is dismal; the sort of house that ought to be occupied by a large family. Well, I am half inclined to come to you. I shall be a free agent in your house, I conclude; able to roam about as I like by day, provided I keep decent hours at night. You will put no restraint upon my movements?"

"None."

"Can you find room for my horse and for my servant?"

"For both."

"Then I will come. Mind, I do not promise to stay with you for any given time. I must be free as the wind. If you can give me sound and peaceful sleep with your mesmeric passes, I shall be grateful to you—and mesmerism. But can you not give me a taste of your quality at once, here?"

"No; I am expected home. If I mesmerised you to-night, I should want to stay with you to see the result of my experiment. Come to me for a week. If by the end of that time your spirits are not tranquillised, and your general health is not improved, call me a charlatan, and have done with me."

"I am very much inclined to believe in you," said Mr. Tregonnell, gazing steadily at the doctor. "You look as if you were in earnest."

"I have been in earnest all my life," answered Dr. Carrick. And then inwardly he added: "But I never had an object worth being in earnest about until to-night."

CHAPTER III. HESTER FINDS A FRIEND.

THE best rooms in St. Hildred House were swept and garnished for Squire Tregonnell. Hester Rushton, who had

a natural womanly love of household duties, was in her element while she bustled about, polishing, dusting, and arranging things for the reception of an honoured inmate. She caught herself singing at her work that busy morning, with a sense of pleasant expectation that was new and sweet. It was a relief to think of a stranger coming to live in that big empty house. Dr. Carrick was of so reserved a temper, that Hester seemed no more intimate with him now, after three years' domestic companionship, than on the day of her aunt's funeral. She could complain of no unkindness. He never spoke harshly to her, even when most troubled in mind. He thanked her courteously for all her attentions; praised her economies and clever management of his house; but he gave her none of his confidence. She felt that she knew no more of his heart and mind than if he had been a man of stone.

About his new patient, Dr. Carrick had told his cousin only that he was a man of wealth and position; that he was to have the best rooms in the house; and that his valet was to be made comfortable in the servants' offices. Hester was more frightened at the idea of the valet than at the grandeur of the master.

Happily, Mr. Tregonnell's body-servant was not a pampered cockney, corrupted by the luxurious idleness of chambers in the Albany, but a clever handy fellow, used to roughing it on board his master's yacht, and with a genius for every art that can make the wheels of daily life work smoothly. He was a first-rate cook, and an accomplished butler; and took upon himself all those delicate labours which were beyond the power of Dr. Carrick's maid-of-all-work.

Mr. Tregonnell stayed out the week, and looked considerably better and brighter at the end of it. He spent his mornings in roaming about the cliffs, or riding in the Cornish lanes; his afternoons in reading; his evenings in the society of Dr. Carrick and Miss Rushton. He was a man who had seen men and cities, and read much. His conversation, therefore, was full of interest; and Hester, to whom all intellectual conversation was new, listened with unvarying delight. It was to be observed, however, that he never talked of himself.

The week ended, and Mr. Tregonnell had no wish to return to the manor. He now firmly believed in the power of animal magnetism. Nightly, in the silence of

his bedchamber, the doctor exercised his potent, but seeming simple art. A steady pressure of his hands upon the shoulders of the patient, a series of mystic passes before the dreamy eyes, and the charm worked. First a new sense of warmth, comfort, and lightness stole through the frame; then the heavy eyelids drooped involuntarily, the will lost its waking power; then came deep, prolonged, and restful sleep, bringing healing and regeneration to mind and body.

This treatment was known to none save the patient and the physician. David Skelter, the valet, had never been in very close attendance upon his master, who was a man of independent habits. His bedroom was on an upper floor, remote from Mr. Tregonnell's apartment, and the valet saw nothing of his master after he had arranged his room for the night.

Hester Rushton's ideas as to the treatment of the patient were of the vaguest. Dr. Carrick had told her only that Mr. Tregonnell required rest and retirement.

So the days went on, and Hester's life took a new colour from the presence of a man of intellect and refinement, who treated her as a being of equal intelligence, and opened his mind to her freely on all subjects that were not personal. Of his opinions she knew much, of himself very little.

Spring advanced. The blustering March winds softened into the gentle breezes of April. St. Hildred House had a good old-fashioned garden—a garden where departed generations had planted homely flowers, which blossomed year after year, unaided by the gardener's art. Everything about the place had been sorely neglected till Hester came, but this garden was her chief delight. Her household duties occupied her all the morning, but she spent every fine afternoon in the garden—her bright young head bared to the spring breeze, her clever little hands encased in thick gardening-gloves—digging, transplanting, weeding, clipping, pruning, with skill that would have done credit to a professed gardener. Labour was cheap at St. Hildred, and for sixpence a day she could get a boy to mow the grass and roll the gravel-walks once a week or so; an extravagance which the doctor hardly approved.

Mr. Tregonnell's sitting-room looked into the garden. One warm afternoon, towards the close of May, he threw aside his book, and went downstairs to join

Hester, who was budding a rose on the lawn.

"How fond you seem to be of this garden of yours, Miss Rushton," he said at her elbow.

His footfall had been noiseless on the thick soft grass, and his speech startled her. The cheek—turned a little from him, but not so far but that he could see its change of colour—flushed crimson, and the scissors shook in her hand.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed. "You don't know what a critical business budding is."

"It looks rather like a surgical operation. Did Dr. Carrick teach you?"

"Dr. Carrick!" laughed Hester. "I don't think he knows a rose from a dandelion, except when he uses them in medicine. No; it was a dear, deaf old gardener in Hertfordshire who taught me, years and years ago."

"Years and years ago," echoed Mr. Tregonnell. "What an eternity of time you seem to express by that phrase. Pray how many centuries old may you be, Miss Rushton?"

"In actual years I believe I am twenty-five," answered Hester, smiling; "but I feel dreadfully old. I suppose it is because I have known a great deal of sorrow. I don't mean to complain. Indeed, I should be very wicked if I did; for my aunt Hedger and my cousin Carrick have both been very good to me; but it is hard to lose those one fondly loves in the morning of life."

"It is," assented Mr. Tregonnell earnestly. "I have known that loss, Miss Rushton, and it has made me what you see—a man without aim or purpose in life—a mere waif to drift about in a yacht, buffeted by the winds and waves, and caring very little what port I put into, or whether I go down some stormy night in mid-ocean, unlamented and unknown. And you, too, have drawn a mournful lot out of the urn, have you, little one?"

"I lost my father and mother when I was fourteen. They both died in the same week. Dear, dear papa was a curate in a Bedfordshire village. A fever broke out, and he took it, and then mamma. It was all like a dreadful dream. In a week they were gone, and I was alone with two coffins. Then aunt Hedger sent for me, and I lived with her. She was old and ailing when I went to her. Her life seemed like one long illness, and then the

end came, and I was alone again. I haven't the least idea what would have become of me if cousin Carrick had not asked me to come and take care of his house."

"You are very much attached to Dr. Carrick, I suppose," said Mr. Tregonnell, looking at her searchingly.

He was wondering whether any hidden evil lurked beneath this outwards simplicity; whether the relations between the doctor and his cousin were pure and free from guile.

"He has been very good to me," answered Hester innocently.

"And you like him very much, no doubt?"

"I like him as much as he will let me. He is my benefactor. I should be base and ungrateful if I did not honour him. I do, for his kindness to me, and for his patience and fortitude, and skill in his profession. I see how much good he does. But he is as much a stranger to me now as when first I crossed the threshold of his house. It is his nature to live alone."

This speech made Mr. Tregonnell thoughtful. He remembered a line of Schiller's:

Fear all things in which there is an unknown depth.

Yet what had he to fear from Dr. Carrick?

All the doctor could possibly desire from him was liberal payment for service rendered, and to have his praises sounded in the neighbourhood by a grateful patient. Mr. Tregonnell had already pressed a cheque for a hundred pounds upon the doctor's acceptance, and had found it difficult to persuade him to receive so large a fee. There was to all appearance no desire to take advantage of his natural recklessness.

Henceforward it became quite a usual thing for Mr. Tregonnell to loiter in the garden, while Hester worked with her pruning-scissors or trowel. He even volunteered his assistance, but Hester laughed at his offer, and declined such clumsy help. They became very confidential during those sunny afternoons; Hester telling the doctor's patient all about her happy childhood, and sad girlhood, freely confessing her want of education, and her ardent desire to learn. Mr. Tregonnell rode over to the manor one morning to select a heap of volumes for her instruction, and ordered them to be sent to St. Hildred House the same day. He took as much pains to choose books that would at once arouse her interest, as if he

had been a father catering for a favourite child.

Sometimes, when the fair May afternoons were especially tempting, he insisted upon Hester's going down to the beach with him; and they idled together upon the rugged strand, picking up masses of many-coloured seaweed, watching the black cormorants perching on the rocky pinnacles, and listening to the great strong voice of the sea. It was altogether a new life for simple Hester Rushton, but the firm fresh young mind was in no wise injured by the association. The clever little housekeeper performed her daily tasks just as diligently as of old. The eager young student, to whom all the world of intellect was new, only applied herself to her books when her domestic duties were done.

CHAPTER IV. MR. TREGONNELL MAKES HIS WILL.

WHILE the acquaintance between Mr. Tregonnell and Hester Rushton thus ripened gradually into a very close friendship, Dr. Carrick was too busily occupied by his daily round of professional work to be aware of the change. He was away from home all day. When he saw his cousin and his patient in the evening, he perceived no more than that they got on very well together. This was as it should be. He wished his patient to be comfortable in his house. Mr. Tregonnell had now been with him three months, and had pressed a second cheque for a hundred pounds upon his acceptance. This was very well, and Dr. Carrick felt that if it could go on for ever his fortune would be made. But how could he hope that the thing would last? Eustace Tregonnell's fitful temper was proverbial. Some morning he would feel the old longing for the wide salt sea, and be off and away in his yacht, leaving the doctor as desolate as Dido. Dr. Carrick's only wonder was that his patient had stayed so long. It never entered into his mind that Hester Rushton's hazel eyes and gentle child-like ways could have any influence upon Mr. Tregonnell. Even the valet noticed the change which his new mode of life had wrought in his master. He talked of it in the village, and lauded Dr. Carrick's skill.

"He's the first doctor that ever did Mr. Tregonnell any good," he said, leaning over the counter of the chief shopkeeper in St. Hildred—grocer, chemist, stationer, and postmaster—for a com-

fortable gossip. "I never saw anybody so tamed down and quieted as master. He used to be all fits and starts, and as restless as if life was a burden to him. Now he seems to find pleasure in the simplest things."

"Ah," said the shopkeeper, "he's been a wild one, I reckon. The Tregonnells always were wild. It's in the blood. But he hasn't been taking any more chloroform, I hope. That's a dangerous habit."

"What do you mean?" asked David.

"Why, he's been in the habit of taking chloroform for pains in his head. You must know that, surely. Dr. Carrick warned me not to sell him any, if he should come here for it."

"I don't know anything about his taking chloroform," said David. "I know he's taken all sorts of things on board his yacht, to make him sleep; but I never heard of his taking chloroform in particular. He's got a little bottle in his medicine-chest, but I don't believe he's ever taken the stopper out."

"Ah," said the village trader, "that's all you know about it. Dr. Carrick warned me against letting him have chloroform, and there was that in the doctor's manner which made me think it was a serious matter."

David Skelter ruminated upon this disclosure of the shopman's. His sturdy English self-respect was offended at the idea of Dr. Carrick's interference with his master's liberty. That any man should go behind Mr. Tregonnell's back, and warn a shopkeeper against treating him as a reasonable being, roused the faithful David's indignation. It was treating the master of Tregonnell Manor like a lunatic.

That evening, after he had arranged his master's room for the night, David looked at the medicine-chest, which had been brought from the manor with Mr. Tregonnell's effects, and stood on the dressing-table, unlocked.

There was the little bottle of chloroform, three-parts full. David remembered his master sending him to get it at a chemist's in Genoa, three years ago, when he was suffering from spasmodic pains in the head. The bottle was carefully stoppered.

"I don't believe master has ever opened it since we left Genoa," David said to himself.

A few days after this Mr. Tregonnell began to talk of his yacht, ominously for Dr. Carrick. It was just the weather for a cruise, neither too cold nor too hot.

"I shan't go far afield," said Mr. Tregonnell; "but I feel that a breath of the sea would do me good. I shall go and cruise about the Scilly Isles, for a week or so, or perhaps sail as far as Madeira, and then come back and settle down again."

David, who was of a roving temper, was delighted at the idea of getting to sea again. His master sent him to Falmouth next day, to buy certain things that were wanted on board the Water Fay.

Mr. Tregonnell went to his room a little earlier than usual upon the evening after David's departure. He had ridden a long way that day, and his horse had been restive and troublesome. He had come home late in the afternoon, much fatigued.

"Oh, by-the-way, Hester," said Dr. Carrick, after his cousin had wished him good-night, "I must ask you not to go to bed just yet, and you can tell Betsy to wait up for an hour or so. I shall want you both in Mr. Tregonnell's room for a minute or two, to witness a deed he is going to execute."

Hester looked puzzled.

"Mr. Tregonnell did not say anything —," she began.

"No; he forgot that the deed would require to be witnessed. He is not very business-like in his habits. The fact is, Hester—it would be a foolish delicacy to withhold the truth from you—Mr. Tregonnell has taken a very noble view of the professional services I have rendered him. He is going to make his will before he goes to sea, and he intends to put me in for a handsome legacy. Of course, taking into consideration the difference in our ages, it is to the last degree improbable that I shall live to profit by his generous intention, but I am not the less grateful."

"It is very good of him," said Hester thoughtfully; "but I wonder that he, who is so careless about all business matters, and so indifferent to money, should think of making his will."

"It is a thing that every man ought to do, and which a man must be an idiot if he neglects to do. Especially a man in Mr. Tregonnell's position, whose property would go to some remote heir-at-law, or possibly to the Crown. Remember he is the last of his race!"

"How sad that seems!" sighed Hester.

She, too, had every reason to believe herself the last frail sprig upon a withered tree. She knew of no kinsman living, save this distant cousin, who had sheltered her.

An hour later, Dr. Carrick summoned

Hester and the servant Betsy to Mr. Tregonnell's sitting-room. Eustace Tregonnell was seated in front of the table at which he usually read and wrote. The shaded reading-lamp threw its light on the papers lying on the table, and left all things else in shadow.

Dr. Carrick stood beside his patient.

"Now sign," he said, with his fingers laid lightly on Mr. Tregonnell's wrist.

Mr. Tregonnell signed the paper before him.

"This is Mr. Tregonnell's will," said Dr. Carrick to the two girls, "written entirely in his own hand, upon a single sheet of paper. You, Hester Rushton, and you, Betsy Thomas, are now to sign as witnesses."

He showed them where they were to put their names, still standing by his patient's chair. Hester had not seen Mr. Tregonnell's face since she entered the room.

She signed her name as the doctor directed, and Betsy signed after her.

"You acknowledge this as your will," said the doctor to Mr. Tregonnell.

"I acknowledge this as my will," repeated the patient.

"That is all. Good-night, Hester; good-night, Betsy. Remember you are neither of you to mention this business of to-night to anybody. Mr. Tregonnell doesn't want it talked about."

CHAPTER V. MYSTERY.

THAT night-scene in Mr. Tregonnell's room made a curious impression upon Hester. She was angry with herself for dwelling upon it so continually, angry at the weakness of mind which made her look back upon the occurrence with a kind of superstitious horror. What was more natural than that a man should make his will? What more praiseworthy than that a grateful patient should reward his physician with a legacy? Could she blame Dr. Carrick for accepting such a boon? Assuredly not. Yet the memory of her kinsman's conduct that night troubled her. It seemed to her as if Mr. Tregonnell, though to all appearance a free agent, had been acting under the influence of the doctor.

She felt that to doubt Dr. Carrick's honour was to be guilty of base ingratitude, and hated herself for her formless suspicions.

"What would have become of me without his help?" she asked herself. "I might have starved."

Eustace Tregonnell said not a word about the will, and this puzzled her; for, as their friendship ripened, he had fallen into the habit of confiding all his thoughts to her attentive ear. He had told her much about himself of late. She had listened tearfully to his story of that early blight which had ruined his life—his first and only love.

"There was a time when I thought that I could never love again," he said to her one day; "but God is good, Hester, and now I begin to hope that even for me there may be some deep unspeakable joy waiting in the future. I would not hasten, or anticipate the hour of its coming. I would not rush impetuously to meet my fate. I would rather let my happiness come gently, by degrees, like the morning light. And those are the brightest days, you know, on which the dawn creeps over the hill-tops gradually, with no sudden burst of treacherous sunshine."

One afternoon the conversation turned unawares upon Dr. Carrick.

"I don't think I can ever be half grateful enough to him," exclaimed Mr. Tregonnell; "he has made a new man of me."

"There are few patients so grateful as you," said Hester.

"How do you mean?"

"Do you forget the will you made the other night?"

"What will? I make a will? Why, Hester, I never did such a thing in my life—I never even thought of such a thing, though I ought to think of it. If I were to die unmarried, my estate would go to some remote next-of-kin; some Mr. Snooks, perhaps, who would call himself Snooks Tregonnell, and come and lord it over my Cornish tenantry. The idea is hateful. I'll go up to Plymouth next week, see my lawyer, and make a will that shall, at any rate, shut out all possible Snookses."

Hester turned her face towards the rose-bush she was clipping, to hide her sudden pallor. All her doubts, all her fears, all her vague horror of that forgotten scene in Mr. Tregonnell's room, came back upon her with new force. In this quiet nature of hers there were latent powers which had never been exercised. This gentle creature was a woman of strong will. She determined to question Dr. Carrick, and get to the bottom of this mysterious business, at any risk of offending her benefactor.

Next morning, when she was pouring out

the tea at Dr. Carrick's early breakfast, she attacked the subject boldly.

"Do you know that Mr. Tregonnell denies that he ever made a will?" she said. "I happened to speak to him about it yesterday, by accident."

"You had no right to speak to him about it," exclaimed the doctor, white with anger—Hester had never seen such a look in his face before. "I told you that the subject was not to be mentioned."

"Not to other people, but my speaking of it to him could not matter."

"It does matter a great deal. Men are sensitive about such things. He chose to make his will, but he may not choose to be reminded of it."

"He most distinctly denied having made a will."

"He chose to deny it."

"What, he chose to tell a deliberate lie? No, Dr. Carrick; I would never believe that of Eustace Tregonnell."

"You would not believe, indeed; and pray what do you know of Eustace Tregonnell, or of psychology? What do you know of the eccentricities of the human intellect? Mr. Tregonnell is extremely eccentric. There are people who call him mad."

Hester was pale as death. Mad! That awful word froze her young blood. Might not that be indeed the clue to the mystery? She had heard Eustace Tregonnell acknowledge that will with the same lips which afterwards denied having made it. There could be no cheat, no juggle there. His own voice had declared the fact.

"If he is mad, the will is useless," she said.

"You are a clever lawyer, no doubt, young lady. I suppose you have never heard of testamentary capacity, which may exist in a patient subject to intervals of mania. A holograph will, executed by a madder man than Eustace Tregonnell, would stand against stronger opposition than is likely to be offered to any will of his."

"He is not mad," protested Hester. "His brain is as clear as mine."

"Very likely. He merely reproves your impertinence in speaking of a forbidden subject, by denying that he ever made a will."

Hester was more unhappy, after that conversation with Dr. Carrick, than she had been before. She had formed a high estimate of Mr. Tregonnell's character. The idea that he could tell a deliberate

falsehood was horrible to her. Yet it was almost worse to think of him as a madman. And who but a madman would have looked her calmly in the face, and denied a fact which she had seen with her eyes, and attested with her signature?

"If he is mad," she said to herself, "my poor woman's wit must keep watch for him."

And then, for the first time, a secret that had lain hidden in her heart for many days past came boldly forth into the light, and looked Hester Rushton in the face. She loved him—she, the obscure orphan, the dependant on a poor man's charity, blest with neither beauty nor accomplishments, a humble household drudge—she loved Eustace Tregonnell, the proudest and richest landowner in that part of the country. She blushed rosy-red, and hid her face from the bold glad sunlight, abashed and stricken by the discovery. How could she dare to lift her eyes to that perfect face, to think of Eustace Tregonnell as a being on the same level with her insignificant self?

"But I don't think of him as my equal," she said to herself; "not for worlds would I have him come down to my level. He is my bright particular star. I only want to look up to him, and worship him all the days of my life."

The idea of some evil mystery in that scene of the will haunted her perpetually. She began to have a horror of the house that sheltered her—that strange old house, with its long narrow passages, winding stairs, queer little closets, many doors, and ghostly reputation. She began to have a horror of her benefactor, Dr. Carrick. Dear as Eustace Tregonnell's society was to her, she longed for him to depart upon his yachting expedition.

June began with stormy winds and driving rains, and the yachting expedition was put off. Indeed, Mr. Tregonnell seemed in no hurry to leave St. Hildred House. He appeared perfectly happy, idling in the garden while Hester weeded her flower-beds, or reading to her while she worked in her favourite seat by a window that looked seaward.

One evening, however, he announced his intention of running up to Plymouth at the end of that week.

"I want to see my lawyer. Can you guess what I am going to do, Dr. Carrick?"

"I haven't the least idea," answered the doctor, sipping his tea.

Hester and the doctor were seated at

the lamplit tea-table. Mr. Tregonnell was standing with his back to the empty fireplace, looking down at them.

"I am going to make my will. It's a disagreeable operation, and reminds one unpleasantly of one's mortality. But I suppose every man ought to go through it. I shan't forget you, doctor; nor you, Hester. Let me see: a mourning ring, I suppose, will be an appropriate mark of my gratitude to you, doctor; and a silver thimble will form a pleasing memento of my friendship for you, Miss Rushton."

Dr. Carrick joined in Mr. Tregonnell's cheery laughter, but he cast a furtive glance at Hester, who sat looking downward, very pale in the lamplight.

CHAPTER VI. FOR LOVE AND LIFE.

ST. HILDRED HOUSE was said to be haunted. There was hardly an inhabitant of the village who would not have vouched for the fact. Noises had been heard; ghosts had been seen, at intervals, and by divers persons, ever since the oldest inhabitant's childhood. The exact form of the apparition, or the precise nature of the noises, was not easy to determine, since everyone gave a different description, and almost everyone's knowledge was derived from hearsay. Till very lately, Hester Rushton had laughed at these rumours, and had never known what it was to feel a thrill of fear in the musty old passages, or to shudder as the gathering twilight peopled the corners of the pannelled rooms with shadows. Now all was changed, she was nervous and apprehensive. She started at a shadow, and fancied she heard a human voice mixed with the night winds that sobbed in the wide old chimneys. One night she was disturbed by sounds that seemed distinctly human: heavy breathing, footsteps moving close to the head of her bed.

She started up, and lighted her candle, convinced that there was someone in the room. Yet she had bolted her door before going to bed.

The room was empty, but again she heard footsteps moving stealthily close at hand.

"The cupboard," she thought. "There is someone in that cupboard."

It was a long narrow cupboard, a kind of enclosed passage between her room and Mr. Tregonnell's. There was a third door in this cupboard, opening on to a corkscrew staircase, that led down to the servants' offices. But this staircase was rarely used,

the door leading into Mr. Tregonnell's room was never opened, and the cupboard was only a receptacle for disused and forgotten lumber.

Hester unlocked the cupboard, and looked in. A man was in the act of escaping by the door that opened on the staircase. She pursued him, candle in hand, her heart beating violently.

Something told her that this was Dr. Carrick, who had been paying a stealthy visit to his patient's room; but, to her surprise, on the first step of the stairs David Skelter turned and faced her, with his finger on his lip, and a look that implored her forbearance.

"Oh, please, miss, don't say anything. I'm not doing any harm."

"But why are you here—hiding in this cupboard—in the middle of the night?"

"It isn't the middle of the night, miss. I was uneasy about master."

"Why?"

"Well, miss, to be candid, I don't like the doctor's goings on. I've had my suspicions of him for a long time. It's too much like witchcraft, the power he's got over my master. It isn't natural you know, miss, and I happened to find out that he'd been putting it into people's heads that my master wasn't to be treated like a rational being, and that turned me against him, and made me think that there was something wrong going on."

"But what wrong can Dr. Carrick do your master, David?" asked Hester, with her earnest eyes searching the young man's face.

"Oh miss, can I trust you? Are you a friend or a foe?"

"I am a friend to Mr. Tregonnell, David; a sincere one."

"Yes, I believe it, miss; I've seen that, and I know something more. I know that he's a friend to you—more than a friend, nearer and dearer. He's been happier and better since he's known you. But I can't make the doctor out. He's too dark for me. Do you see that cupboard-door?" pointing to the door opening into Mr. Tregonnell's room. "The other morning, when I was putting away my master's things, it struck me that we might as well have the use of this cupboard. I tried the door, and found it locked inside. I could see the nozzle of the key in it. Then it struck me that this cupboard-door must communicate with some other room or passage, and then I remembered the door at the head of these stairs, which I'd

never seen open. I came round by the stairs, and examined the cupboard, and I found a little shutter or flap opening in that door—it had been made for ventilation, I suppose—through which I could look into my master's room. And that very night, feeling uneasy about him in my mind, after I'd gone up to bed, I crept down again, and looked through the little shutter to see if he was all right. And there I saw——"

"What, David? It was very wrong to play the spy upon your master."

"I saw the doctor conjuring him—hocusing him, miss."

"What do you mean?"

"So, miss—like this."

And David made solemn passes with his hands before Hester's face.

"He did that, miss, and sent master to sleep as quiet as a lamb. Now, I don't like to think that any man should have the power of sending my master to sleep."

Hester heard him in silence, deadly pale, breathless. She had the clue to the mystery now. It was mesmeric influence that composed the patient's restless mind to sleep; it was under mesmeric influence that Eustace Tregonnell had written and signed the will, of which in his waking state he knew nothing. Among the books which Mr. Tregonnell had brought her, and one which she had read with deepest interest, was Lord Lytton's "Strange Story." She had read also that thrilling story, by the same author, "The House and the Brain," and the doctrines of magnetic influence were not unknown to her. Dr. Carrick was just the kind of man—studious, passionless, self-contained—to exert such influence, to be familiar with that unholy art. He had used his power to get a will executed—a will which doubtless bestowed more upon him than the legacy he had spoken of to Hester. But that will would give him nothing so long as Eustace Tregonnell lived, and Eustace Tregonnell was at least eighteen years his junior. How remote must be the benefit which Dr. Carrick could hope for from that will. Again, it would be cancelled, mere waste-paper, the moment Mr. Tregonnell made another will, and he talked of doing so at the end of the week. All through the night Hester lay broad awake, thinking of Dr. Carrick, and trying to fathom his motive for a deed, which was, to her mind, as dark a crime as the worst forgery that had ever been perpetrated.

"The will is made, and he will be eager

to profit by it," she thought, with an icy thrill of horror creeping through her veins. "He is no longer interested in prolonging his patient's life. He must wish for his death, for he would not have committed this crime if he were not greedy of money. He will want to prevent Mr. Tregonnell's making a second will, and how is he to do that?"

How, save by the worst and last of crimes—secret murder?

A wild terror seized upon Hester, as she saw herself face to face with this hideous thought. The idea, having once taken hold of her, was not to be thrust out of her mind. How else, but by Eustace Tregonnell's speedy death, could the doctor profit by his crime? His profession gave him a fatal power. He had the keys of life and death in his hand, and Eustace trusted him with blind unquestioning faith.

"I will not leave him in a secret enemy's hand," she thought; "I will tell him everything to-morrow. I owed gratitude and affection to my cousin, while I believed him a good and honourable man. I owe nothing to a traitor."

She rose at her usual early hour, with a torturing headache, and hands burning with fever. She was startled when she saw her altered face in the glass.

"I hope I am not going to be ill," she said to herself, "just when I want the utmost strength and clearness of mind."

It was an effort to dress, an effort to crawl downstairs, and take her place at the breakfast-table. She was obliged to omit those small duties which had been her daily task—the finishing touches to the dusting and polishing of the furniture, the arrangement of a bowl of freshly-cut flowers for the table.

The day was hopelessly wet, a dull gray sky, a straight downpour, that shut out everything except the sullen waste of leaden sea, crested with long lines of livid whiteness. There was no chance of Mr. Tregonnell going to Plymouth on such a day as this.

Dr. Carrick looked curiously at his cousin's pale face, but said not a word. Mr. Tregonnell, who rarely appeared so early, joined them before the doctor had finished his first cup of tea.

He was not slow to perceive that something was wrong with Hester.

"Good heavens, Miss Rushton, how ill you are looking!" he exclaimed.

"I do not feel very well. I had a wakeful night."

"Why, what should keep you awake?" asked Dr. Carrick, looking sharply up at her.

"I hardly know. My mind was full of queer fancies. That awful story haunted me, the story you read to me a few days ago, Mr. Tregonnell."

"Well, it is rather uncanny," answered Eustace; "I am so sorry I read it to you. I ought to have considered that your nerves would be more sensitive than mine. I read it to you merely as a work of art, a masterpiece of graphic style."

"I was very foolish to think of it as a reality," said Hester.

Dr. Carrick laid his fingers on her wrist.

"You had better go to bed, and stay there, if you don't want to be seriously ill," he said; "you are in a high fever, as it is."

"Impossible," answered Hester, "I have all sorts of things to do."

"Of course. A woman always fancies the earth will stop, if she takes her hand off the machinery that makes it go round. I am sure you can have nothing to do to-day, that can't be as well done to-morrow. If it's a question of dinner, that clever fellow, Skelter, will cook for you. If it's any fiddle-faddle about the house, a muslin curtain to be ironed, or a chintz chair-cover to be mended, let it stand over till you are well. I shall be at home all day, if I'm wanted. I've no urgent cases, and it would be too cruel to take a horse out of his stable unnecessarily on such a day as this."

Hester remembered many such days on which Dr. Carrick had spared neither himself nor his horse. She was obliged to submit to his orders, and go back to bed, for she was really too ill to resist him. She laid herself down dressed upon the outside of the counterpane, with her thick winter shawl wrapped round her; for although her head and hands were burning, a feeling of deathlike cold crept over her at intervals.

It seemed the longest day she had ever lived through. The ceaseless drip of the rain upon the leaves of the sycamore, whose spreading branches obscured half her window, the unchanging gray of the sky, the sullen murmur of the sea—all added to her gloom of mind. She would have given worlds to have seen Eustace Tregonnell alone, to have told him all she had discovered, all she feared; but she felt powerless to rise from her bed, and, even if she could muster strength and

courage to go downstairs in quest of Mr. Tregonnell, she knew that Dr. Carrick was on guard below, and would do his utmost to prevent her being alone with his patient. There was nothing for her to do but to lie there with aching head and anxious mind, waiting for night.

The good-natured maid-of-all-work came to her several times in the course of the day, bringing her broth which she could not touch, and divers cups of tea, which were welcome to her parched lips. She eat nothing all day, but drank deep draughts of cold water. Night came at last. She heard the doors shutting below, and footsteps ascending the stairs. How well she knew each footfall! The doctor's soft deliberate step; David Skelter's tread, quick yet heavy; Mr. Tregonnell's firm light step; the maid-of-all-work's slipshod ascent. And then all was quiet. The church clock struck ten. The rain was still falling. There was not a star in the sky.

Hester lifted her head with an effort from the pillow where it had lain so heavily all day long. She crawled to her door, and noiselessly set it ajar, so slightly, that anyone passing would hardly notice that it was not shut. Then she opened the door of the closet. The light in Mr. Tregonnell's room shone brightly through the crevices in the sliding shutter. Then she crept back to the room-door and listened with all her might.

After about ten minutes she heard the doctor's step coming along the passage from his own room. He knocked softly at Mr. Tregonnell's door, was told to enter, and entered. Before the door closed, Hester heard the patient say:

"Upon my word, doctor, I don't believe I need your ministrations to-night. I feel honestly sleepy."

Here the door was firmly shut, and on this side Hester could hear no more.

She went quietly back to the closet, and drew near the sliding shutter. At the same moment the door leading to the servant's staircase was cautiously opened, and David Skelter crept in.

All was dark in the closet. It was by intuition only that Hester knew the intruder. One rash exclamation from him and she was betrayed. She put one hand over his mouth, grasping his wrist firmly with the other, and whispered in his ear:

"Not a word! not a movement! I am going to watch with you to-night." And then, with infinite caution, she slid back

the shutter for about an inch, and looked into the room.

Eustace Tregonnell was lying outside the bed, wrapped in his long velvet dressing gown, in an attitude of supreme repose. Dr. Carrick was seated beside the bed, his hands moving slowly in mesmeric passes before the patient's dreamy eyes. In less than a quarter of an hour Mr. Tregonnell had sunk into a mesmeric sleep, profound, peaceful, deathlike.

So far there was no wrong done. The patient was consentient; mesmerism had exerted a healing influence over mind and body; mesmerism had been Dr. Carrick's only treatment.

"That's all, miss," whispered David. "He'll go away now, and leave master to sleep it out. It's against nature that one man should be able to send another to sleep, and I don't like it."

"There is no harm in it, David," replied Hester.

But the doctor did not leave his patient. He withdrew from the bed, and stood, with his back to the mantelpiece, intently watchful of the sleeper. This lasted for more than five minutes; Hester still watching from the shutter, David close at her side.

And now Dr. Carrick crept stealthily across the room to the dressing-table, opened the medicine-chest, and took out a bottle.

"It's the chloroform, miss," whispered David. "I know the bottle."

This word chloroform awakened a vague fear in Hester's mind. She felt as if she were on the threshold of some hideous discovery.

"David," she whispered, close in the valet's ear, "run down softly, as fast as you can go, open the street-door, and ring the bell. Quick, quick!"

The man obeyed without understanding her. His shoeless feet ran swiftly down the stairs.

Dr. Carrick went back to the bed, took the stopper out of the bottle, and deliberately poured the whole of the contents on Eustace Tregonnell's pillow. The patient lay on his side with his face towards the fireplace. The doctor sprinkled the chloroform exactly under his nostrils. Then with a delicate hand, as carefully as if he had been covering the face of a sick child, for whom sleep was the sole chance of cure, he drew the light coverlet over Eustace Tregonnell's head, and stood looking down at the shrouded figure with an evil smile on his face.

In the next instant the street-door bell was ringing violently.

"Great Heaven! who can it be at such a time?" cried the doctor, hurrying from the room, with a backward uneasy glance at the bed.

Hester unlocked the closet-door, and rushed into Mr. Tregonnell's room as the doctor disappeared. She threw back the coverlet from the sleeper's face, snatched the pillow from under his head, dashed cold water over head and face, flung open the window to the cool, moist, night air, all without loss of an instant. She, who all day had been powerless to lift her head from the pillow, seemed in those terrible moments endowed with unnatural strength.

Eustace stirred, faintly at first; then, as Hester dashed more water into his face, his eyes slowly opened, he gave a struggling sigh, and at last raised his head and looked at her, with eyes that expressed only vague wonder.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"I think I have saved your life," she said quietly; and then, her brain suddenly reeling, she fell in a heap on the floor beside his bed, not unconscious, only giddy and helpless.

Dr. Carrick came back, saw his intended victim sitting up with his eyes open, and his cousin on the ground by the bed. A glance told him that the game was lost. He did not understand how it had happened—how Hester came there—but he knew that his scheme was a failure.

"What the devil have you been doing to me, Dr. Carrick?" asked Eustace, not in the most amiable mood after awakening from deepest unconsciousness to find himself in a pool of water. "Have you been experimenting in hydropathy? And, good Heavens! what an odour of chloroform! My shirt must have been drenched with it."

"You were restless, and I sprinkled a few drops on your pillow. In the name of decency, Hester, what are you doing here?"

The girl rose to her feet, steadied herself with a great effort, and looked her kinsman full in the face. David Skelter had followed the doctor upstairs, and stood on the threshold, ready to rush to his master's aid the moment he was wanted.

"I know all that has happened to-night," said Hester, with those steady eyes on the doctor's face. "I saw all—David and I—we were both watching you through the little shutter in that closet-door. You

forgot that shutter, did you not? I saw you empty the bottle of chloroform on the pillow, and draw the coverlet over your patient's head. You were trying to suffocate him. I suppose suffocation of that kind leaves no trace. You have got your patient's will—the will that leaves you everything, no doubt; and all you wanted was to get rid of your patient. You have failed this time. David, take care of your master—neither his property nor his life are safe in this house."

"Devil!" cried the doctor, beside himself. "Liar! Dirt that I picked up out of the gutter—a pauper who must have begged or starved but for my help! A pretty story to hatch against me, forsooth! Mr. Tregonnell, David, I call you both to witness that this woman is either a lunatic or the most outrageous liar that ever drew the breath of life."

"This woman is my future wife," said Eustace Tregonnell, rising from the bed, and supporting Hester's tottering figure with his arm. "Yes, Hester, you will let it be so, will you not? I offer you the life you have saved. It is no new thought, love; it has been my pleasant day-dream for a month past. David, you scoundrel, pack my portmanteau this instant. Dr. Carrick, I shall have the felicity of leaving your hospitable abode early to-morrow, but I shall take Miss Rushton with me, and find a more desirable residence for her with our good old vicar and his family, until the church can make her mistress of Tregonnell Manor. Now, Hester, my dear, go back to your room, and lock your door. I don't think Dr. Carrick will try his chloroform treatment on you; he knows that David and I understand him."

The baffled villain stood, pale, silent, scarcely breathing—an image of humanity frozen into marble. Then he roused himself slowly, gave a profound sigh, and walked to the door.

On the threshold he turned, and looked steadily at his patient.

"The night I first saw you I was inclined to think you a madman, Mr. Tregonnell," he said deliberately; "now I know that you are one. I shall be heartily glad to get rid of such a dangerous inmate. My house is not certified for the reception of Innatics; and if your habits were known, I should get into trouble. Take care of your master, David. He'll want a strait-waistcoat before you have been much longer in his service."

"That's a lie, and you know it," David retorted bluntly.

Mr. Tregonnell took Hester to the vicarage early next morning. He told the vicar everything, and confided the young lady to his friendly care, pending her marriage. The vicar had a comfortable wife, and grown-up daughters; and Hester spent a month among these new friends—a month that was like one long dream of delight, for did not Eustace Tregonnell dedicate all his days to her society?

St. Hildred House was left empty within a few hours of Mr. Tregonnell's departure. The maid-of-all-work was paid and dismissed without warning. Dr. Carrick told her that he had a letter from London which obliged him to leave St. Hildred without an hour's delay. A rich relative was dying, a relative likely to leave Dr. Carrick a handsome fortune.

This fiction decently covered the doctor's retreat. He was soon lost in the labyrinth he knew so well. Despair had fastened its grip upon his soul. He had tried honesty; he had tried fraud and crime. Both had failed.

"I am one of those unlucky mortals born to fail," he told himself. "Neither God nor the devil will help me."

Dr. Carrick made another appeal to the devil. He started in a disreputable neighbourhood as a practitioner of the lowest order—a practitioner who stuck at nothing. For a time things went well with him, and he made money. Then came a scandal, imprisonment, disgrace; and Dr. Carrick went down to the very bottom of the social gulf, never to rise again.

For Hester and her lover life holds nothing but happiness. They spend six months of every year cruising in the brightest waters, anchoring by the fairest shores, and the rest of their days at Tregonnell Manor, where, being wealthy and generous, they are universally beloved.

OUR SENSATION AT UNTER-BÄDELI.

BY FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER I.

WE were a very select society. At least, that was what we called ourselves—"select;" though I don't know by what rule we were selected, nor who selected us. But never mind! We were recognised as being a very select society, and we were justly proud of the distinction.

We were rather too few for some people's taste. Mrs. Ruddiman, for instance, the stout widow, was heard to declare that the dreary stretch of white cloth and empty chairs at our table-d'hôte, with a handful of guests huddled together at one end, made her so low-spirited, that she used to go to her own room every day after dinner, and cry over a photograph of the late Mr. Ruddiman, which she wore in a brooch. I don't know whether it was true; but one thing is certain, Mrs. Ruddiman removed herself very shortly to the Hôtel du Rütli, up the street, where we could see the lights flaring until quite late at night—to a quarter past ten o'clock very often!—and could hear such a gabble of voices, and the jingling old piano, and sometimes a fiddle—for they danced at the Rütli in a promiscuous unceremonious kind of way. We thought the Rütli very low, to tell the truth; and many of us wondered how Mrs. Ruddiman could bear to leave the select society of the Hôtel et Pension des Alpes for that. But Miss Hawk said that Mr. Ruddiman had been a meat-salesman, and what could you expect?

Miss Hawk came of a very good family—she frequently said so herself—and her manners were very commanding. So was her figure. She measured five feet eight inches in her stockings: that was the phrase she always used. I think I never saw so upright a figure as Miss Hawk's. It was not a plump figure. You could not conscientiously call it so. At the same time we thought it coarse in Mrs. Ruddiman to express herself as she did about it: "A back-board stuck flat against a broomstick." But of course if it was true that Mr. Ruddiman had been a meat-salesman, why—!

I think that on the whole we considered Miss Hawk to be the leader of our society. And I am almost sure that she considered herself to be so. It was not only amongst us English that Miss Hawk was looked up to. There were several Swiss in the Hôtel des Alpes, who paid her great attention. They were ladies and gentlemen—at least a gentleman—from Lausanne, and the neighbourhood of the Lake of Geneva; and they were naturally attracted to Miss Hawk by her proficiency in the French language, which she spoke with remarkable fluency. I did notice occasionally that they did not appear to understand what she said, all at once. And certainly her French sounded very

different from theirs. But she often observed that the Swiss never speak with a really pure accent, although they may know the language well enough in theory. And I suppose Miss Hawk's accent was a little too pure for them sometimes.

Possibly you have never been at Unter-Bädeli, Lower Littlebath, as we used jocosely to call it amongst ourselves? It is not very much frequented by foreigners, but its waters are excellent. Every one of the doctors living in the place agrees with his colleagues about that. And as one hears it said, "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" I suppose one ought to be quite convinced they are right when they do agree. Nevertheless, Unter-Bädeli is not much frequented by foreigners. The guests are chiefly Swiss. There are a few Germans, fewer French, and just a small number of English who reside in Switzerland, and know all the "ins and outs" of life there, as Miss Hawk used to say. Miss Hawk herself lived during the greater part of the year in a pension in Geneva. Her means were rather limited. The means of most of us were rather limited. Rich people, somehow, scarcely ever come to Unter-Bädeli. There were, I believe, plenty of well-to-do farmers and shopkeepers at the Rütli—people who spent enormous sums on their eating and drinking, and drove fat horses in rough country chaises. But with these persons we, at the Hôtel des Alpes, had nothing to do. Our house was the genteeldest—indeed the only genteel—in the place. Mrs. Ruddiman used to complain of the cooking, and say she was starved. But surely, as Miss Hawk put it in her lofty way, it was better to partake of a temperate meal in a proper *salle-à-manger*, served by a waiter in a tail-coat, although it might be a little rusty, than to revel in coarse profusion at the Rütli, where you were waited on by young women in peasant costume, and where the dining-room was little better than a big kitchen with a sanded floor!

One afternoon we ladies were sitting in the salon after dinner—we dined at one o'clock—when one of the gentlemen of our society came into the room, telling us that there was news. When I say "one of the gentlemen," I mean *the* gentleman; for at that time there was but one staying at the Alpes, an elderly gentleman named Puits-de-fond. I believe he would have been a count, if Switzerland hadn't happened to be a republic. He suffered from rheumatic gout, and was slightly

humpbacked, but extremely polished. Well, Monsieur Puits-de-fond came into the salon and announced that he had some news. Of course we were all much interested; for, to say the truth, there was rather a lack of excitement at Unter-Bädeli, and the time hung a little heavy when once you had had your bath, and your douche, and your dinner. The news was the arrival of two new inmates at the hôtel. They were a young married couple from Bâle. The husband was in business there, and the wife was a German from Nuremberg.

"In business?" said Miss Hawk doubtfully. "Do you mean that he keeps a shop, Monsieur Puits-de-fond?" But Monsieur Puits-de-fond said that the newcomer did not keep a shop, but was a manufacturer of silk ribbon on a large scale, and was very rich. We all agreed that to be a manufacturer of silk ribbon on a large scale was a very different matter from selling it on a small one; and we intimated, or at least, Miss Hawk intimated for us, that we saw no reason to refuse our countenance to these Bâle people. Monsieur Puits-de-fond knew a great many more particulars about them—as, for instance, that they had only been married last year; that they had a very smart villa and gardens just outside Bâle; that they kept three horses; that Madame Krafft—that was their name—had not had a penny when she married, and was very pretty, and a little extravagant in her dress. It was astonishing how Monsieur Puits-de-fond picked up all the gossip he knew about everybody! I said something of the kind to Miss Hawk afterwards; but she objected to the word "gossip" as applied to him. Monsieur Puits-de-fond, she remarked, had a great fund of light and amusing conversation, and knew how to speak trifles with a well-bred air. It was a gift which had distinguished many Frenchmen of rank in the good old times. And only persons of good blood could do it really well. Monsieur Puits-de-fond's blood must have been very good indeed; but unfortunately that special manifestation of it was not always appreciated. Mrs. Ruddiman once called him—I really don't like to write down the words—a wry-necked, malicious old magpie! We were terribly shocked. But we reflected—at least Miss Hawk reflected for us—on the poor woman's unfortunate antecedents, and overlooked the expression.

Herr Krafft and his wife walked into the salon whilst we were in the very middle of a discussion about them, and we all bent over our work—Monsieur Puits-de-fond seized a newspaper upside down—in a great hurry. Herr Krafft was a big, broad-shouldered, light-haired Swiss, of some eight-and-twenty or thirty years old. There was nothing remarkable about him in any way, unless, perhaps, an air of remarkable good-humour. Madame Krafft was certainly very pretty. She had dark wavy hair, and sparkling brown eyes, and cheeks like a rose-leaf, and red lips and white teeth, and a love of a travelling costume!

"Paris made!" whispered Mrs. Devaux, behind her hand, to Miss Hawk; and Miss Hawk nodded. Mrs. Devaux was an authority on subjects of dress. She was a great traveller; had been in the East, and spoke all modern languages. That sounds like an exaggeration, I am aware. And perhaps she may have forgotten one or two when she said she knew them "all." But if she knew them nearly all, I think that's quite wonderful enough.

Herr Krafft seemed a little shy, and talked to his wife in an undertone, and looked out of the window a great deal, although there was really nothing to see there. But madame was not a bit shy. She had very pretty, coaxing, little manners, and went over to Miss Hawk and admired her wool-work, and altogether behaved so becomingly, that we were enchanted with her. She spoke French pretty well; but her husband, we found, spoke it very well indeed, and English also. And when he did begin to talk, we found him a pleasant well-informed young man. I believe every one of us felt somehow freshened up and exhilarated by the arrival of these two young people.

Herr Krafft went away from Unter-Bädéli the next morning. He could not afford to be absent from his business long at a time, he said. But his pretty wife remained. She had come to Unter-Bädéli for the waters; though I'm sure she might have sat for a picture of the goddess of health. Monsieur Puits-de-fond seemed to think that she had nothing the matter with her at all, and that she had only come to the baths to get a little change and liberty, and to escape from the troubles of housekeeping for awhile. But Miss Hawk almost quarrelled with him about it. I remember we all sat in breathless

silence, when they began to speak sharply to one another. "What did Monsieur Puits-de-fond mean?" she asked severely. Madame Krafft was sweetness and ingenuousness itself, and quite incapable of pretending anything. If she said she needed the waters, of course she did need them. And as to her wanting liberty—it was quite evident that Herr Krafft idolised his wife, and indulged her in every possible way, so that was nonsense! Monsieur Puits-de-fond took a long and loud pinch of snuff, and devoted himself to Mrs. Devaux for the rest of the day. But it blew over, and he and Miss Hawk were perfectly civil to each other. Only I don't think they ever regained their old "entente cordiale," as Mrs. Devaux called it. Mrs. Devaux insinuated that Monsieur Puits-de-fond was jealous of the attention bestowed on little Madame Krafft. He used to be the principal object of attention in our circle, after Miss Hawk; being the only gentleman, you see, he may have been a little spoiled among us. But now the new-comer eclipsed him. As to Miss Hawk, she was quite bewitched by Madame Krafft. Three days had not elapsed before she called her by her christian-name, Melanie—a mark of familiarity she had never bestowed on any of us! When I hinted as much to her, she replied: "My dear, you are all women of about my own age"—we were not; at all events, I was several years Miss Hawk's junior; not that it matters, but I like to be accurate—"whereas, Melanie is a mere girl, young enough to be my—niece."

By the end of a week, Madame Krafft had worked quite a revolution in our society. She was very fond of gaiety, and somehow or other she contrived to find some even in Unter-Bädéli. For instance, there was a concert of Tyrolese singers one evening at the Rütli, and what did she do but persuade us all to go to it! She had an answer to every objection. Miss Hawk shook her head about the "mixed company" at the Rütli; but Madame Krafft answered that we could keep to our own little coterie, and be even more distinguished in that way from the vulgar than if we stayed away altogether. Then Mrs. Devaux observed that smoking was permitted in the *salle-à-manger* of the Rütli; and Madame Melanie immediately replied, with her coaxing little smile: "Oh, surely, dear Madame Devaux, you are too much of a cosmopolite to mind that! A woman of the world, as you are; one who

has travelled so far! In short, one way or another, she brought us all round, and we went to the concert.

Mrs. Ruddiman stared as if she had seen a procession of ghosts, when we all marched into the big dining-room at the Rütli. But presently she jumped up, and came and shook hands with everyone of us, laughing and talking in her loud voice, until every head in the room was turned towards us. "Lord, I'm glad you've plucked up a bit of spirit, and come to hear the music," said she. "I'm sure it's deadly dull for you over yonder, poor things!" jerking her head in the direction of the *Hôtel et Pension des Alpes*. She meant well, I'm sure. And indeed, to say the truth, she had a hearty way with her, which I couldn't help liking.

Well, the Tyrolese music was very pretty. It went up and down a good deal—I believe they call it jodeling—in a way that reminded me of a very high swing we had at home when I was a girl; but it was very pretty. And the costumes were pretty, and made a nice change to look at. And really all the people at the Rütli were very civil. I couldn't help thinking that, after all, good-nature and kindness go a long way towards making polite manners. As to Miss Hawk, will you believe it, when the fat smiling landlady, in her black velvet bodice and silver chains, as they wear them at Lucerne, came round to take the guests' orders, Miss Hawk actually ordered a glass of Bavarian beer; and, what is more, she actually drank it! Madame Krafft laughed like a child—she was very childlike in some things—when they set down a good-sized glass of beer before her. But she said: "Oh, I must drink it all, if I die for it, to do honour to my country, you know!" And she did drink it all. And so far from dying, I couldn't see that it had any disagreeable effect on her whatever. In short, we all enjoyed our evening—"our little escapade," Mrs. Devaux called it—and became quite jolly. That is to say, we all enjoyed it, except Monsieur Puits-de-fond, who couldn't quite get over the vulgarity of the company. He kept making biting remarks about everything and everybody. However, nobody minded him a bit. And as to Madame Krafft, she only laughed at him, in her frank playful way, until the tears came into her eyes. But—and now I am coming to the beginning of an adventure, which made a great noise at the time in Unter-Bädéli—the next morning at

breakfast, Monsieur Puits-de-fond began talking in a different strain. He pursed up his mouth, and looked very serious, and dropped his voice mysteriously, when he asked Miss Hawk if she had observed a certain person sitting at a corner table in the big room at the Rütli. And when she said yes, she had noticed a man in the place mentioned, and had thought him a hulking ill-looking fellow, Monsieur Puits-de-fond further enquired whether she had noticed the looks and manner of that individual towards—and here he dropped his voice still lower, and wrinkled up his nose quite viciously—towards a certain member of our party.

I immediately thought of Madame Krafft, and I believe everyone of us did so too. She was not present; for she said getting up early did not agree with her health, and she usually had her breakfast in bed. There was a short silence, and then Mrs. Devaux said that the man had certainly stared persistently at Madame Krafft; but that as Madame Krafft didn't seem to mind it, she thought no one else need do so either.

"Madame Krafft is pretty well used to his stares by this time," said Monsieur Puits-de-fond; "for to my certain knowledge he has followed her about, and haunted every walk and every place she has frequented, during the last five days."

Then everybody seemed to speak together. There was a great noise and confusion. Never had I witnessed such excitement in the salon of the *Hôtel des Alpes*! Miss Hawk indignantly repudiated any insinuations against her "sweet Melanie." Mrs. Devaux was anxious to declare that she had known all, and observed all, and understood all, from the very beginning. One or two of the other lady-boarders were shocked, and almost frightened. In short, we had a "scene." If we had formerly pined for a little excitement at the *Hôtel des Alpes*, we now had rather more than was pleasant. At length Miss Hawk majestically demanded silence, as she wished to make a statement. Everyone was quiet directly; perhaps from curiosity, perhaps awed by Miss Hawk's commanding manners. It would take a great deal of time and pen and ink and paper to give Miss Hawk's statement in her own words, for she made quite a long speech. And indeed I cannot pretend to remember it accurately. But the gist of it was this: that Madame Krafft had confided to her

that she was followed and persecuted by the attentions of the person in question, whose very name was unknown to her; that for her own part she—Melanie—could treat such conduct with calm contempt, and not trouble her head about it. ("Well, she didn't seem to mind," put in Mrs. Devaux, very sweetly.) But that, unfortunately, Karl—that was her husband's name—with a thousand excellent qualities possessed one defect, namely, a tendency to jealousy. Now, this being the case, she was of course most anxious to remove any shadow of uneasiness from his mind, by shunning, even to a ridiculous extent, the slightest appearance of coquetry or vanity in her own behaviour. ("Oh, she hasn't made herself at all ridiculous in that direction!" put in Mrs. Devaux again.) And, finally, she besought Miss Hawk to remain with her in her walks and drives, at the concerts of the band, and during the morning when the company sipped the waters in the Kurhaus, and to give her the inestimable benefit of her countenance and advice. "And I have done so," said Miss Hawk, in conclusion. "I should not have revealed Melanie's confidence under any other circumstances. But when misconception—to use no harsher word—spreads its baleful influence around, I deem it my duty to dispel the cloud at once and forever, by declaring the truth upon my own personal responsibility."

Miss Hawk's revelation created a great sensation. We were all impressed by it, and interested—immensely interested. It was like a bit out of a play or a story; and I am sure we all watched Madame Krafft afterwards, in the sort of admiring sympathising way in which one regards the heroine of a novel. Only, I am sorry to say, that Mrs. Devaux did not come out quite nicely on this occasion. She had for some time past shown symptoms of wavering in her allegiance to Miss Hawk. And now she and Monsieur Puits-de-fond made common cause, and turned into almost open enemies of the rest of us. They sneered at Madame Krafft, and even spied upon her in a downright mean way. I was sorry to see it; for Mrs. Devaux was a very accomplished woman, and, besides knowing so many languages, she could amuse us by the hour with anecdotes of the great people she had known in her travels, and was altogether an acquisition to our society.

Well, matters went on much in the

same way for three or four days more. Madame Krafft had a short visit from her husband, who came over from Bâle for a few hours just to see her. He was obliged to return the same evening because a large order was in course of execution at his factory, and he superintended everything himself. It was a most agreeable sight to see him and his pretty wife walking arm-in-arm up and down the long avenue of lime-trees in front of the Kurhaus. They looked so healthy and happy, and so fond of each other! And really, after the number of sickly, wrinkled, not too-good-humoured faces which we beheld daily, the sight of this young couple was, as I said, refreshing. As for the "person," the persecutor, as we called him, he slunk into the background altogether, and during those few hours of Herr Krafft's visit I believe we none of us set eyes on him. We despised and detested him, and observed to each other that his whole bearing and appearance were low—I am not sure that some of us did not go so far as to say ruffianly. Miss Hawk acted as the most faithful of guardians, and Melanie was the most interesting and engaging of youthful matrons; an innocent frisky lamb, frolicking confidently under the very eyes of the wolf.

CHAPTER II.

ONE day—the second or third, I think, after Herr Krafft's visit—a surprising item of news began to circulate in Unter-Bâdéli. We had no lack of news and excitement now, certainly. Mrs. Devaux declared we were becoming sensational enough to come out in penny numbers. I don't like that style of expression; but such were her words, and there really was some truth in them. It turned out that the persecutor was a prince in disguise! No; I really am not joking. I know it sounds incredible, but he was a prince, a real prince, and staying at Unter-Bâdéli under a false name! Monsieur Puits-de-fond knew all about him. The persecutor called himself Herr Tiefenthal; but his true style and title was Prince August of—— I will not write the real name; let us say X. He had a brother an ambassador, and an uncle a cardinal, and was connected with serene highnesses more than I could tell you, unless I had an Almanach de Gotha at hand. But he was a black sheep—a regular mauvais sujet, said Monsieur Puits-de-fond. He had

made a *mésalliance* with an opera-dancer, and his family had forgiven him. He had made huge debts, and his family had paid them. He had been accused of foul play at a gambling-table, and his family had got him out of even that scrape. But after that they exiled him; sent him into a genteel sort of banishment, and made him an allowance, on condition of his causing no further scandal to their name. He was a terrible person, was Prince August of X. But, nevertheless, prince he was, born and bred, and nothing could un-prince him.

Well to be sure, here was an incident to happen in our small quiet Lower Little-bath! What was peculiarly awkward was, that we had declared the man to be indelibly stamped with the marks of low breeding and coarse vulgarity. Even Miss Hawk's penetration had been deceived—she who was wont to declare that she could recognise good blood at once, by virtue of its affinity with her own. It was very awkward; and I know we all felt it to be so, by our so pertinaciously holding our tongues on the subject of the man's vulgarity. As to not talking about him at all, that was impossible.

Miss Hawk called me up to her own room that first morning that we heard the news. She was very kind to me, and I think she liked me the better for showing no jealousy at her preference of Melanie, as Monsieur Puits-de-fond and Mrs. Devaux had done. Any way, she now called me into her room, and began to consult me confidentially as to what she had best do under these new circumstances.

"Do?" said I. "I don't quite understand. What can be done? And why should you be expected to do anything?"

"Why, my dear, I mean as to Melanie. I must break it to her, you know. She will be terribly startled. With all her gaiety and high spirits, she is very timid."

As Miss Hawk paused and looked at me, I felt obliged to say something, so I observed that it was a comfort we were not now in the Middle Ages; and that even princes had to pay some respect to the police nowadays.

"Oh yes," replied Miss Hawk; "I don't suppose the man would attempt to carry her off, if you mean that. But, the truth is, I think the best thing she could do would be to take her railway-ticket for Bâle and go back to Herr Krafft. A pretty young creature like that ought to have her husband's companionship and protection.

You see, as long as this—this individual was a mere nobody, the matter was trivial. And, out of our own set, I daresay not three people in the place noticed his persecution of Melanie. But now that it is known who he really is, he will be the mark for inquisitive eyes. And Madame Krafft might—might become the subject of disagreeable remarks and observation. Would you mind staying, whilst I tell Melanie, and helping me to persuade her to go home?"

I did rather mind; but I wished to please Miss Hawk, so I stayed; I was rather surprised to find her need any sort of support from me. But she was fluttered and upset, and a little mortified withal. I suppose it was natural that a person of her commanding manners should be more cast down at making a mistake than an ordinary woman would be.

Well, Madame Melanie was called into the stuffy little bedroom, and the great news was broken to her. She was very much surprised; very much so, indeed. Mrs. Devaux and Monsieur Puits-de-fond tried to make out that she had known it all along; but I am very sure, from my own observation, that it was not so. Besides, from what happened afterwards, anyone might see that she had had no idea at first who Herr Tiefenthal really was. But I had better go straight on with my story. Yes, Madame Melanie was very much surprised at our news. If you ask me on my word of honour, I cannot say that I think she was as much startled as Miss Hawk expected; nor that Miss Hawk's account of the "individual's" iniquitous career appeared to shock her to any painful extent. But surprised the little woman was, thoroughly. She kept repeating over and over again, "Prinz August! Prinz August! Why, his sister married the reigning duke of —! I saw her once in Munich, where she was visiting at our court. She was in an open carriage with the queen. Prinz August!"

As soon as Miss Hawk could get in a word, she broached the suggestion that Madame Krafft should forthwith return to her faithful Karl. But Madame Melanie had not the slightest intention of flying from the enemy. Go home! Why should she go home? She must go through the "cure." The cure lasted three weeks, whereas she had only been in Unter-Bâdéli a fortnight. It would be very silly to rush off to Bâle just now. And besides— with a queer awe-stricken dropping of

her voice, like the tone of a well-trained servant in his master's presence—besides, Prinz August might take it amiss, if he fancied she went away to avoid him.

"Take it amiss!" echoed Miss Hawk. And I must say I had never seen her look so majestic as she did at that moment, nor so tall. "Let him take it amiss! Of all ways in which he could take it, that is certainly the most desirable."

Madame Krafft looked at her with a singular expression.

"His brother is the reigning prince," said she, in an anxious explanatory manner.

A dark red flush ran all over Miss Hawk's face—it was a pale grayish-tinted face in general—and she turned her head away abruptly. After a few seconds she turned it back again, and slightly stroked Madame Krafft's wavy dark hair as she said:

"What a child you are, Melanie! You really need someone of experience and savoir vivre at your side. Well, as I know you, I am only beginning to find out what a baby you are!"

If Madame Krafft were a baby she was a very obstinate sort of baby. She took her own way with true German tenacity and stolidity. She had apparently none of the sort of imagination which torments sensitive people, by vividly presenting to them possibilities of their being wrong, or at least of seeming wrong to the eyes of others. If you differed from Melanie Krafft on any point which interested her, you were wrong. That was all. She believed it with a firm—I had almost written stupid—kind of faith. There was no other alternative conceivable by her mind. Miss Hawk watched her and followed her about all that day with unflinching fidelity. She reminded me—I hope it does not sound disrespectful, I did not feel so at all—of a hen that has hatched a duckling. Towards evening, it being fine and warm and balmy, Miss Hawk proposed a stroll under the lime-trees to the whole company. I assented willingly; so did Monsieur Puits-de-fond; so did two or three other boarders. Only Mrs. Devaux and Madame Krafft said nothing. I suppose, however, that we all took it for granted that they were coming, for when we assembled to set off in a stately and genteel progress through the one narrow street of Unter-Bädli towards the shady alley by the Kurhaus, there was a general surprised enquiry after the missing

ones. But they did not appear, and poor Miss Hawk was in a fidgety nervous state about Melanie's absence.

"Mrs. Devaux is with her," said I, reassuringly. "She is all right, depend on it."

"Of course she is all right," replied Miss Hawk, loftily rebuking my want of tact. "There can be no doubt about that. Only—one only one misses her. She is so gay and amusing."

"Her friendship with Mrs. Devaux is rather sudden, isn't it?" sneered Monsieur Puits-de-fond. "I don't know that Madame Melanie has chosen the most judicious adviser for her inexperienced innocence, eh? Mrs. Devaux is a charming woman, though, despite her lack of judgment. Very charming! So free from prejudices!" And here Monsieur Puits-de-fond took a very noisy pinch of snuff, with his head on one side, and—I hope you will not think the worse of me for confessing it, but Mrs. Ruddiman's rude description of him as a "wry-necked malicious old magpie," did recur to my mind. Just then, who should appear in the alley but Mrs. Ruddiman herself. She looked very hot and fat and good-humoured, and greeted us all from a long way off, at the full pitch of her voice.

"Well, I declare! Here you all are!" cried she. "All but two of you, that is. Deserters, I call 'em; and I told 'em as much. We shall have 'em over at the Rütli for good and all before long. It suits me, to be sure. But then I'm different. I like good victuals; and at my time of life I needn't mind saying so."

We stared at each other blankly. I believe Miss Hawk would have given much to bow and pass on, without asking any questions at that moment; but Monsieur Puits-de-fond would not give her the chance. He pounced—he really did—on Mrs. Ruddiman, and had the whole story out of her then and there, in her loudest voice and most outrageously bad French. Mrs. Devaux and Madame Krafft were supping in the little beer-garden behind the Rütli in company with Herr Tiefenthal!

I will draw a veil over the scene which followed. But this one word I must say: Monsieur Puits-de-fond displayed the triumph of a fiend. Poor Miss Hawk! I was so sorry for her that the tears came into my eyes; but I tried to hide them, for fear of mortifying her the more.

Well, we didn't walk long in the pleasant

summer evening after that. When we got back to the hotel, Miss Hawk asked me to go upstairs with her, and we had a long talk in her room; and she actually cried, poor soul! But through it all she was stanch to Melanie. She was vexed with her, and disapproved her conduct; but she was convinced, she said, that the young woman meant no evil, and was only foolish, and inexperienced and ill-advised. For Mrs. Devaux, Miss Hawk had no such excuses to make. And, indeed, she said such severe things of her, in her most majestic manner, as made me quiver with nervousness. And I may as well say first as last, that I quite agree with Miss Hawk about Melanie. I don't believe that she ever had it in her mind to do any harm, but she was pigheaded—there, it's out!—and foolish, and—could not understand the sentiment of "Britons never, never, never will be slaves."

We waited until she came home, which was as late as nine o'clock, I am sorry to say. Mrs. Devaux went swishing up the stairs past Miss Hawk's door in a great hurry, and didn't stop, or look, or turn her head. I saw her through the partly-open door, and she had her best black silk on, and a pink bonnet. But Madame Krafft came boldly up, humming a waltz-tune, and as she passed the door she looked in and said: "Bon soir, chère Miss Hawk," quite gaily. She did look very pretty, in a bright blue muslin gown, and a white straw hat trimmed with forget-me-nots, and her gloves fitting like her skin. That I must say. Well, Miss Hawk stopped her, and made her come in, and spoke to her—oh, so beautifully! I wish I could remember her words, so high-principled, so ladylike, so full of the most refined propriety. But as for Melanie, I assure you she did not appreciate them one bit. All she could say was: "But what harm could there be in it? Madame Devaux was with us. And Madame Devaux was delighted with the prince. Of course she was gratified by his notice. His brother is the reigning prince, you know." Just as if that made everything right, instead of making everything more wrong than before. And when Miss Hawk, at her wits' end to make her see the matter in its true light, said: "But, Melanie, remember, you were so annoyed by his staring and following you, and you thought him such a hulking, ill-looking, low sort of fellow," she only answered, as cool as a cucumber, and smiling as if she thought

it was Miss Hawk who was stupid: "But I didn't know who he was then. We none of us knew."

I cannot say whether it was with more pleasure than apprehension that we heard two or three days later that Herr Krafft was to arrive on Saturday, remain in Unter-Bädli during the Sunday, and go away, taking his pretty wife with him, on the following Monday morning. When I say "we," I mean Miss Hawk and myself. Mrs. Devaux was certainly not pleased at the news; and Monsieur Puits-de-fond, whether pleased or not, certainly felt no apprehension on the subject. Herr Krafft had written to his wife to say that he should arrive by the last train on Saturday evening—that is to say about nine o'clock. Miss Hawk heard this from Monsieur Puits-de-fond, for Melanie never confided in her now. Not that the little woman seemed to draw off from Miss Hawk, or to bear her any grudge; but Miss Hawk herself withdrew from the intimacy, and left the field open to Mrs. Devaux, who was constantly supping and jaunting about with Madame Krafft and Herr Tiefenthal, and at the latter's expense. Melanie, indeed, never could apparently understand Miss Hawk's feeling on the subject. "It isn't wrong," she said to me once; "but even if it were, what harm could it do Miss Hawk? The prince don't invite her to supper." Well, to answer that, you see, one would have had to begin such a long way back, and to teach Madame Melanie one's own views on the subject of right and wrong from the very foundation. For my part I couldn't attempt such a task. Could you?

Thursday passed, Friday passed, Saturday morning came. Miss Hawk drew a breath of relief. "That foolish child will be safe under her husband's care before this day is over," said she. But we little guessed what was to happen first.

About six o'clock Miss Hawk, being in the drawing-room where we all were, walked up to Madame Krafft and said: "Melanie, my dear, we haven't had a stroll together for a long time. Will you take a little walk with me and Miss Griggs"—I am Miss Griggs—"and hear the band, and then sup with me as my guest at the Rütli, where there is to be an Italian mandoline-player, who plays beautifully, Monsieur Puits-de-fond says—will you, my dear, for this last evening?"

Now I did think it very sweet and good and kind-hearted of Miss Hawk to

make this proposal after all that had happened; for I knew that she did it in order that Melanie's husband might find her in company he could approve of when he should arrive, and not be told that his wife was supping with that—that brute of a Herr Tiefenthal, as he chose to call himself. Madame Krafft looked at her with the pretty innocent-looking smile which I had really begun to hate, knowing how much stupid obstinacy there was behind it, and how little gratitude or feeling, and said she: "Oh, very well. I will go to the band with you if you like; but I can't sup. I am engaged to—to Mrs. Devaux."

This was too much for us all; too much even for Miss Hawk, who turned away with a stately bow, and said aloud to me: "On second thoughts, my dear Miss Griggs, we had better not sup at the Rütli. If you don't mind giving up the mandoline-player, we will eat our supper at least in respectability here."

Of course I agreed. But before seven o'clock, which was the usual supper-hour in Unter-Bädeli, Miss Hawk had changed her mind. She was really uneasy and unhappy about that little unfeeling woman, and she and I walked into the great room at the Rütli, and sat down at a little table by ourselves, and ordered coffee. "If I can but persuade her to go home, and be at home in good time for her husband's arrival!" said poor Miss Hawk. And her feeling was so clearly right that it made me ashamed of the angry words against Melanie that rose to the tip of my tongue, and I swallowed them down again.

Well, there we sat and sipped our coffee for nearly half an hour; and finally in marched Mrs. Devaux, leaning on Herr Tiefenthal's arm, and looking as proud of it as a peacock; and close behind them Madame Melanie, with a huge bouquet in her hand, smiling and bridling, and showing her white teeth, and flashing her bright brown eyes, in a most provokingly cheerful and unconcerned way. At first they didn't see us in our corner; but after awhile Melanie caught sight of us, and smiled and nodded, and Mrs. Devaux actually had the impudence to smile and nod too, although Miss Hawk hadn't spoken to her for a week. She received a bow in return that would have chilled me to the marrow; but she only tossed her head and said something to that—that wretch of a prince; and they both laughed in the coarsest way. Presently the landlady brought

them their supper, and they began to eat and drink, and to talk louder and louder. Melanie looked at her watch, and Mrs. Devaux said, quite loud enough to be heard all over the room: "Don't worry yourself, my dear. The train cannot arrive for three-quarters of an hour yet, and it takes twenty minutes more to drive from the station." She had hardly got the words out of her mouth when she gave a queer muffled sort of scream, like a person violently startled. We looked round—everyone in the room looked round—and there stood Herr Krafft behind his wife's chair, facing the prince, and looking at him with as thorough disgust and contempt as I ever saw expressed in an honest face.

"Karl!" cried Melanie, and she flushed very red; but upon my word I do believe it was from surprise, and not from a guilty conscience, whatever Monsieur Puits-de-fond might say or insinuate. Then she threw her arms round him and kissed him on both cheeks before us all, in her German fashion. "Come home, my dear," said he. "You have fallen into very unfitting company. I wonder there was no one kind enough to advise you better. That man is not a proper associate for an honest burgher's wife." He spoke very quietly, but quite distinctly, and "Herr Tiefenthal" must have heard every word he said. Melanie looked shocked at her husband's bluntness. But she thought to set matters right by whispering to him in a hurried eager manner the magic words, "Prinz August of X." I saw her lips frame the syllables. Herr Krafft, however, was in a white heat of indignation, and not one whit moved by this grand announcement. "Whether this person is skulking about under a false name or not, I neither know nor care," said he, just a thought louder than he had spoken before; "but I, who know the world, tell you, who don't know it, that he is not worthy to sit at table in my wife's company. Come, Melanie!"

By this time there was a breathless silence in the room; every eye, every ear, was intent on the little group at that table. And on nearly every face was expressed sympathy with and approval of Herr Krafft. Perhaps it was the sense of this general hostility which spirited up "Herr Tiefenthal" to make an effort of self-assertion. At first he had sat slouching and blinking in his usual "hangdog" manner. The phrase is Mrs. Ruddiman's, but so appropriate that I couldn't refrain

from using it. But now, just as Madame Melanie was being marched off uncere- moniously, with her hand tucked under her husband's arm, he leant forward and thrust the big bouquet—his gift, of course—upon her with a jesting word or two in French, and as he did so he touched her arm. In one instant—it was as if a thunderbolt had fallen amongst us—there was a thud and a crash, and Herr Tiefenthal was lying prone on his back on a sanded floor, with Karl Krafft standing over him, looking quite terrible. He had knocked him down with one strong well-directed blow.

After a second or two, one or two of the men in the room came forward and hoisted up the prince, who looked rather dazed, and very wicked and vicious, as he growled out a string of oaths and threats in guttural German. "You're a low rascal, beneath my notice," said he, with his head turned towards Krafft, but his eyes on the floor. "I'll have you beaten by my grooms."

"Pooh!" cried the other. "You had better hold your tongue and be quiet. We are free men here. You've had a lesson—profit by it. And understand, that if I catch you presuming to address this lady again, or even to lift your eyes to her, I will flog you soundly, like an ill-behaved dog. I wish this honourable company good-night!" And with that out he stalked, taking his wife with him.

There was dead silence for a few moments, and then Mrs. Ruddiman stood upright in the centre of the room, and pulling out her handkerchief and waving it, called out "Hooray!" with such hearty loudness, you might have heard her a mile off. Well, then there was a regular roar of laughter. Everybody laughed until the tears ran down their faces, and Mrs. Ruddiman laughed too, and insisted on treating the company to wine, and went about shaking hands right and left. And said she, in her wonderful French: "That has done me good! That's better than champagne! Lord, I should like to hug that young man!" The last sentence she said in English, which I was rather glad of. Of course, this was not agreeable for Mr. Prince; who, indeed, slunk off in the confusion and noise and laughter, and was seen no more. And so ended our great sensational adventure in Unter-Bädeli.

That is to say, there it ended for aught the world knew; but of course it had consequences, as all conduct, good or bad, has. And I do believe that this event, which might have had a disastrous effect on all

the rest of Melanie's married life, really produced a beneficial result, on the contrary. For the fact is—at least, so it seems to me, but I never was a clever woman, and I may be wrong—that Melanie conceived a much higher respect and admiration for her husband after seeing him knock down a prince, than she ever had before! Fond of him in her way she had always been, no doubt. But now, she looked up to him with a reverence which was very wholesome for her. And he was very good to her; very gentle and tender and manly. He harboured no evil suspicions of his young wife; and I, for one, am very certain he was right there. What she had done was, however, wrong enough and foolish enough, and he pointed it out to her very plainly. Indeed, with Melanie Krafft, it was of no use to be too delicate and considerate. She was dull of apprehension in some things—very. One thing I liked Herr Krafft for, and always shall—he appreciated Miss Hawk, and did her justice. She never said a word about her having warned and counselled Melanie. But somehow Herr Krafft found it out, and spoke to her. And she, instead of making much of what she had done, made little; and gave all the testimony she could in Melanie's favour. Miss Hawk, indeed, behaved nobly, and Mrs. Ruddiman made it her business to call on Herr Krafft, and sing Miss Hawk's praises, so that she became quite a heroine. "And," said Mrs. Ruddiman, "if her manners were rather high, so were her principles! But height in manners, and lowness in behaviour, like that Mrs. Devaux, is enough to turn your stomach. And as to figure—well, some of us are too stout, and some too lean; but the great thing is to have your heart in the right place. And, would you believe it, that Tiffytal's gone off, leaving a score behind him as long as my arm at the Rütli, for beer and tobacco!"

OLD SIR PIERCE.

BY DUTTON COOK.

It professed to be a Photographic Saloon and Fine Art Gallery—and that account of it was inscribed in large and small letters here and there about the building over and over again, as though facts could be contradicted and totally routed by force of simple iteration and reiteration; for, in truth, it was a humble affair enough. The

small front-garden of a stunted suburban house, the centre of a row of like lowly and unpretending tenements, had been boarded over and covered in after a rude impromptu fashion, so as to form something between a booth and a shed. Little attempt at decoration had been made; but about the entrance were suspended numerous specimens of inexpensive photography—the kind commonly known as “colloidion on glass.” Among these were to be found, presumably as a means of bringing home to the public the skill and success of the operator, portraits of various persons easily recognisable in the district, such as the milkman, the policeman, the crossing-sweeper, and a certain omnibus-driver of eccentric aspect. But, of course, the majority of the portraits represented very undistinguished people; the artist's chief patrons were, as it seemed, homely of feature, as of occupation. Many domestic servants had sat to him; nurses, or young mothers, with babies on their laps; tradesmen's boys in the habits of their trade; with a sprinkling of private soldiers in undress uniform, armed with penny canes; nearly all somewhat blank of look and distressed of expression: the victims of photographic art in its rudest and most ruthless form.

The neighbourhood fringed London on the north. What had once been a country road, was gradually undergoing conversion into a town street; private houses were one after another being changed into shops. Here and there some resolute occupant had refused to yield up his garden to the purposes of trade; and however elbowed and frowned upon by the adjoining structures, maintained his little sooty, shady enclosure, rich in vegetation of a dark-brown hue, as the courtyard of a private residence. The taverns, and there were many of them, still preserved something of a rural look, as though still pretending to be country inns; boasting old-fashioned signboards, swinging and creaking in mid-air, and rough-hewn horse-troughs straddling before the doors. A fondness for signs and signboards, indeed, characterised the locality. On all sides might be seen those trade emblems which are discarded as barbaric in the more central parts of the town; gilded hams and flitches; red and blue and yellow sugar-loaves; life-size Scotchmen, with very curly whiskers, severely taking snuff out of rams'-horns; goldbeaters' arms and mallets; barbers' poles spirally-streaked with colour; and

scarlet teapots of enormous dimensions. There was busy traffic in the roadway; up and down the middle glided unceasingly the tram-cars, to the music of clattering hoofs and jingling bells.

The wooden edifice, with its many inscriptions, in the small front-garden, was but a sort of photographic show-room; the studio was above, on the roof of the house, an apartment screened and covered in with glass and canvas in about equal proportions. A tortuous, unsteady staircase, that creaked and crackled at every step, was the means of approach to this chamber. The light was dim, the shadows perplexing, the atmosphere somewhat moist, heavy, and unpleasant; a smell as of poverty, and uncleanness, and want of repair pervading the premises. After the gloom of the staircase, the glare of the studio was rather overpowering. In such wise, perhaps, was explained the fact that so many of the photographs represented persons afflicted with bleared, weak, and watery eyes.

This upper chamber commanded a panoramic range of chimneys, and a view of the hills that border and shelter London on the north. A bright sun had been shining, and it was very hot in the studio; but it was one of those bright suns that are always attended by sharp, strong east winds. Every now and then came a whistling noise about the little room on the roof, like a burglarious signal for an attempt to break the panes of glass and burst into the premises; and at intervals there was much roaring and rushing round the stacks of chimneys, as though efforts were being made to hurl them bodily into the street.

The photographer—his hands, stained and soiled with nitrate of silver, black as though he had been picking walnuts or polishing grates, proclaimed him the photographer—sat alone in his studio, smoking a short pipe; the odour of tobacco combining curiously with the chemical smells inseparable from his pursuit. He was a shabby-looking man, with dusty hair and rusty beard, lean and angular of form, middle-aged, wearing a faded flannel-shirt of a brickdust colour. He was dipping small squares of glass in a pail of water, wiping them dry with a cloth, and then polishing them upon a ragged scrap of dirty washleather. Suddenly he suspended his labours.

“Was that a footstep?” he asked himself. He paused for a few seconds and

listened. "No, only the wind shaking the back-door. A fine day like this, and not a soul comes near the place! I suppose they'd come in shoals if the weather were dark, and foggy, and drizzly. But no, they wouldn't. It's plain to me they won't come at any price. What more can people want, I wonder? Only sixpence, with gold frame included." He held out one of the squares of glass, breathed upon it, and polished it with his leather. "Why, it's dirt cheap. It's too cheap, indeed, to get one's living by. But then," he added grimly, "I don't live by it; I only starve by it." Angrily he threw from him the little square of glass he had been polishing. It was shattered, as it dashed upon the floor. He shrugged his shoulders as he contemplated the fragments.

"Not that it's any good smashing the stock-in-trade," he said. He puffed at his pipe to keep it alight. But he put it from him again, and went to the door to listen.

"I'm right this time. There's really someone coming upstairs."

He put on his coat, hurriedly arranged an untidy necktie, and ran his fingers comb-wise through his hair. This was a sort of rapid toilet, accomplished by way of homage to the approaching visitor.

"That's a wretchedly crooked staircase," he said, as he listened. "It's no wonder that people blunder and stumble as they do. I'm always expecting those banisters to give way altogether. This way, sir. Mind the step, please. You're all right now."

But an expression of disappointment crossed his face. His visitor looked miserably poor. A man, whose shabby slouched hat half concealed a very woe-begone face, pale, and pinched, and worn, stood in the doorway, wrapped in a thread-bare cloak, beneath which he carried a bundle, as it seemed; round which a long, claw-like hand gathered, for its better protection, the folds of thin frayed cloth. He was panting—was evidently fatigued by the ascent of the creaking stairs. Presently a fit of coughing seized him, shaking him cruelly. It was some minutes before he could speak. Meantime the photographer surveyed him with a puzzled air, which had yet something of commiseration about it.

"You take photographs; and cheaply, very cheaply?" asked the man hoarsely.

"Very cheaply indeed."

"I want a photograph taken, but——"

"Stay. I think there's something you need still more."

The photographer hastened to produce a bottle and a remnant of a loaf of bread.

"You're not strong, you know. One can see that with half an eye. And you're a trifle faint. You can't stand much exertion; and those stairs are trying. They've proved a little too much for you. And you need food. That's what's the matter with you."

"It's not that," the visitor said, waving his hand rather wildly. "I mean—you're very kind—you mean to be kind, and I am much obliged to you. But don't speak, please, only listen. Don't think me rude—only let me say what I've got to say and have done with it."

"Mad," muttered the photographer, resuming his seat and his pipe.

"You photograph the living—can you photograph the dead?"

"Mad, without doubt," the photographer again muttered. In another moment he started to his feet. His visitor had tossed away his cloak. He was carrying in his arms a child of some two years, simply robed in white—or rather, it should be said, the body of a child.

"Asleep?" asked the photographer, with yet a look upon his face that showed he knew what the answer must be.

"Dead—stone dead!" Tears streamed down his face as he said the words; his voice broke. "My poor little boy! My own little Hugh! He was taken from me this morning—only this morning. But I knew the blow was coming. I've known it a long while. He died without a moan—quite painlessly; even with a smile upon his lips, as you see him now. That was his good-bye to me—for he uttered no sound. He died with his hand in mine. I only knew he was dead by the little hand growing so cold, so icy cold, so dead cold." He turned away, trying to hide a grief that indeed could not be hidden.

"One would think to look upon him, that the poor little thing was still asleep," said the photographer softly.

"If I could think that! But then I know—I know. He's dead, dead, stone dead."

"Your only child?"

"My only child. Thank God!" Then he added, after a pause: "Should I not thank God? Could I wish for other children, to suffer as this poor little one has suffered? to die before my eyes as this little one has died? to own for their father one so fallen, and wretched, and degraded as I am? No. Will you photograph the poor little boy?"

"If you will have it so—yes."

"The light will serve?"

"The light will serve well enough."

"I wish to send the photograph home."

He broke into a strange laugh. "I call it home—though it's no home of mine now—though it can never more be home to me. But I mean my father's house. We quarrelled—years since. We're not likely to be friends again—or to speak to each other—or to meet face to face again on this side of the grave. He would have it so, and it has been so, and will be so now, until the end. I don't know why I tell you these things. They're nothing to you—they can be nothing to you. But it seems to me that sometimes trouble acts upon men—upon far stronger men than me—like drink; and makes them giddy, and weak, and garrulous, and mad, in spite of themselves, just as I feel now.

"I want the photograph to send home," he resumed, after a pause; "one of the photographs, I should say, for I must have another to keep myself. It will be little enough, but it will be something, to hug to my heart and to cover with kisses, when my poor little man is hidden away in his grave. You see, my father wanted possession of the child. He wanted to make terms with me—he would have given much if he could only have got the child away from me. I was cast off; he would have nothing to say to me. But it was different with the child; he would have petted and made much of him—have humoured and indulged him in every way, have made him his heir. Yes, and he would have taught him to hate his father. He would have parted us, you see; that was his object. But I could not have that. He was my own child. It would have been like selling him for gold. For it came to that. An allowance was to be paid to me, so long as I kept away from my child, so long as I helped to hide from him the fact of my existence. It could not be, you know. It was better for us to cling together, even though we suffered together, and starved together, and it has been something very like starving together in these latter days. Are you ready? Tell me how to place the poor child. Let the light fall on his face. You never saw prettier gold-coloured hair than that? There's no hint of death there, is there? But I've heard or read somewhere that hair lives and grows on even after death. On this pillow, with this drapery beneath and above? Yes, that will do. Touch

him gently, please. But I'm sure you haven't the heart to deal roughly with the poor little one."

"Heaven forbid!"

"For he was always used to gentle treatment, poor and miserable as I've been; and he heard only words of kindness, poor child; and he never knew, perhaps, the struggle I had sometimes to get bread for him. He did not feel, perhaps, how hard, how very hard, our life was. I tried to keep that from him. I tried so, for his sake, to make out that things were much better than they really were; to persuade him to think so, at any rate."

"His mother. Does she know?"

"His mother died in giving him birth."

"Poor child! poor child!" said the photographer, very sadly, as he brushed his hand across his eyes.

"They are both in heaven now. Is there need to pity them? How happy she will be to clasp her baby to her heart, for the first time! She died, you see, before she had time even to look upon her little one. Poor little mother! Poor tiny child. Well, well, they are together now, never to be parted again."

The photographer adjusted his camera.

"One moment," he said.

But he was absent some minutes. Meantime the father sat beside the body of his child, tenderly laid upon a pillow, with its white draperies neatly folded about it. The face seemed wasted somewhat, but wore no look of suffering; there was even a smile upon the pallid lips, that were as dead rose-leaves. The long, dark silken lashes cast soft shadows upon the colourless cheeks. A delicately-featured child, with a complexion of exquisite purity and transparency, it seemed not dead, but rather a waxen image of sleep.

The father sat motionless, his arms resting upon his knees, his face buried in his hands, a tangled growth of hair falling over his forehead. The photographer returned presently, bringing with him a handful of flowers. These he proceeded to strew gently about the body of the child.

"God bless you!" said the father, with a sob. "You're a good man. Your name's Osborne, isn't it? I saw it written up below. I shan't forget it. I knew an Osborne once. Jack Osborne, his name was, down in Devonshire."

"You knew him?"

"Yes. I'm speaking of years ago. Jack Osborne, the vicar's son, at Stoke Deverill, Devonshire."

The photographer remained silent for a minute; then approaching his visitor, he said: "I am that Jack Osborne, and you—yes, it must be so. But how you're altered! You're Hugh Challoner!" For some moments they stood still, earnestly gazing at each other.

"To think of our meeting like this! It was mere chance brought me here. You were the nearest photographer. I had no other reason. Strange! If anything's strange; and I begin to doubt it. I've gone through so much that nothing can seem very strange to me, except, perhaps, good fortune. I've known so very little of that." They shook hands with a sort of sad cordiality.

"I'm glad we've met again, Hugh, though certainly we might have met under happier circumstances. It's long since we've seen or heard anything of each other. Yet we've been travelling the same road, it seems, all the while—the road to ruin, I mean; an easy journey, downhill all the way."

"Somehow, I felt from the first that I was talking to a friend. I read as much in your eyes, I think. I am sorry you've had ill luck, too, Jack. Yet it can't have been so bad as mine. You've no dead wife or child to mourn?"

"No, Hugh, it's not been so bad as that with me. But it's been bad enough—thanks to myself, chiefly. I confess it. Mine is an old, old story of folly and error, wastefulness and wickedness. I've led a miserable, shifty, vagabond, worthless life. No one knows that better than I do. Of late I've been trying this trade. I used to think I was rather clever as an operator. But time and trouble certainly knock the conceit out of a man."

"I'm very glad it's fallen to you to photograph the poor child, Jack," said Hugh Challoner. His great sorrow had made him selfish; he could scarcely give attention to his friend's narrative. "You'd have loved the little one if only you could have seen him alive, Jack. He was the brightest, cheeriest, prettiest little man, eyes ever looked upon. Even now you can see for yourself what a little beauty he was."

Jack Osborne nodded his head significantly. Hugh Challoner stooped down to kiss, once more, the cold lips of his dead child. Jack Osborne busied himself again with preparations for the photograph.

"I must tell you my story some other time, Jack," said Hugh Challoner, sighing deeply. "It doesn't differ so very much

from your own. At least, misfortune has been the burthen of it all through."

"Is there no chance of your making peace with your father?"

"There is no chance. You've forgotten what Sir Pierce was like, or you would not ask such a question. Age has not changed him much—has not softened his heart in the slightest degree."

"And your sister?" The photographer averted his face somewhat as he asked this question. "Can she do nothing, Hugh? She was your firm friend in the old time."

"Poor Nelly! She is my firm friend still, for that matter. But what can she do? What can I ask or expect her to do? Nothing."

"She is unmarried?" asked Osborne, still with his face turned from his interlocutor.

"She is unmarried, Jack. Yet changed, I fancy, from what she was as you knew her, Jack. She is the old man's slave—bound hand and foot. She moves and thinks but as he bids her. She has no will of her own. She lives only to obey him, and tend him, and wait upon him."

"She loves her father," said Osborne. "She always loved him."

"Yes—if that can be called love which is so much made up of fear."

"Don't blame her, Hugh, for loving her father."

"I don't blame her. Who am I—that am I—that I should blame anyone?"

The photographer held up his hand by way of signal. There was perfect silence in the studio.

"I think I've been successful," said Osborne presently. He was speaking of the photograph—his voice issued from the recesses of a dark cupboard. He reappeared, drying his hands with a ragged towel.

"You must tell me where you are to be found, Hugh."

"I live in a very poor way, in a very poor place," Hugh said, with troubled looks.

"Let us hope for better times, Hugh. And—let me help you if I can. I'm poor enough myself, Heaven knows! yet I may do something. And you'll want money now, you know."

"To pay for the little one's coffin? Yes; I've been thinking of that. I've been reckoning over what I could turn into money. But there's little left me, very little, that's of any sort of value. I've a room at No. 12, Parton's Rents; it's a wretched place, but there was no help for

it. Beggars can't be choosers, you know. You know the place? You go over the canal-bridge, and turn down by the gas-works. Anyone thereabout will point out Purton's Rents; it isn't really a stone's-throw from here, though it's hard to find—hidden away as though people were ashamed of it; and certainly it isn't a place to be proud of."

So they parted.

"Poor Hugh—and has it come to this? I thought my own luck as bad as it could well be. Yet his is worse. Not that I find the fact so very consoling. What a change a few years makes! Why, it seems only yesterday that we were all so happy together down in Devonshire. What fools we are when we're young; and yet how happy we are. I don't know that we grow so much wiser as we grow older, but certainly we grow sadder. Then came the storm that separated us and sent us all adrift. I loved Nelly Challoner, and she—but what does it matter now whether or not she loved me back again? It was a mad dream. I was not her equal—I was unworthy of her in every way. And old Sir Pierce was furious. So ended that romance. And Hugh? I remember hearing something about it; but it happened long afterwards. He fell in love with his sister's governess. I forget her name; but it doesn't matter. Yes; his sister's governess—that was the story, I think. And he was sent away from home. If, afterwards, he defied his father and married her, and this child is their child, that would account for much. But it's terrible to think of. Can it really be that Sir Pierce is so unforgiving, so ruthless with his only son? Poor Hugh! How little did I think, when I first took up with this miserable trade of mine, that I should ever be called upon to photograph Hugh Challoner's dead child!"

Enquiring for Hugh Challoner in Purton's Rents, Jack Osborne could at first learn no tidings of him. People shook their heads—they didn't know the name. Didn't know as they had ever heard of such a name. Did he mean the gentleman on the two-pair back?—the gentleman whose little boy was dead? Ah! Yes! He was in. He didn't go out much. And wasn't likely to go out much, worse luck.

It was a wretched room, with a sloping roof. The ceiling was stained with the damp, and broken in places, exposing the bare rafters, and freely admitting the rain.

Many window-panes were patched with paper, or their places supplied with rags. The floor was carpetless, and of furniture there was very little. On a crazy-looking chair rested a child's coffin, of the plainest and cheapest sort.

Hugh lay stretched upon a ragged paillasse; the straw was forcing its way out at every aperture of the soiled cover.

"Is it you, Jack?" he asked faintly.

"It's very good of you to come."

"How goes it with you, old man? See, I brought a bottle of wine; and here's food—bread and meat."

"You're very kind, Jack. I want to get up my strength if I can; but I feel dreadfully knocked over, just now. The east wind plays the deuce with me—pierces through me, and seems to chill and pinch my very bones. But you see I must make haste and be well, to attend the little one's funeral. You've brought the photograph? I'll send it—home."

"You'll tell them in what straits you're in, Hugh? You'll tell them where they may find you, and render you help and comfort?"

"I'll send my father the picture of his dead grandchild. He shall see and know what he has done. He has sought to punish me; he shall judge whether I am punished enough. He may find, perhaps, that the blow fallen upon me has not left him unharmed. He has made me suffer. I hope and pray that he may suffer too."

"Hush, Hugh!"

"How can I hold my peace? Or if I keep back my words, do you think I can check my thoughts? Jack, that poor child's death lies at his grandfather's door. I say that he is verily guilty in this matter, in that he saw the anguish of my heart, when I besought him, and he would not hear! For I did beseech him for bread to give the child. Its death was hastened by sheer want, Jack. Can you think of a poor little starving child, Jack, and keep the tears back from your eyes? He could, Jack—the child's grandfather. Can I hope that he should not suffer?"

A carriage, containing a lady and a gentleman, had stopped in front of the Photographic Saloon and Fine Art Gallery. So unusual a spectacle occasioned some stir. For it was a carriage of a highly-fashionable description, with crests upon its burnished panels and tasselled hammer-cloths, with powder whitening the pomaturned locks of its coachman and footman.

"Here's a old gent going to be took," observed a street boy to a friend of his own age and position, as the gentleman with some effort descended from the carriage, and, leaning upon the arm of the lady, approached the Photographic Saloon.

"You're sure you're right, Eleanor? You're quite sure? What a place! What a neighbourhood!"

The lady consulted a card she carried in her hand. On one side of the card appeared the photograph of Hugh Challoner's dead son; on the other, was inscribed the address of the photographer.

"Yes; this must be the place," she said. And they entered the Photographic Saloon and Fine Art Gallery, and were presently mounting the stairs to the studio.

"Sir Pierce and his daughter," muttered Jack Osborne with a start. An expression of embarrassment flitted across his face, and for a moment his cheeks flushed.

"Your name is Osborne, I think," Sir Pierce began, in rather pompous and artificial tones. "I have called concerning a photograph which has been lately sent to me—a photograph of a child." As he spoke he took the card from his daughter's hand, and exhibited it to the artist.

"How he's changed!" mused Jack Osborne, as he affected to examine the portrait. "How old he looks, how feeble, and shattered altogether! And he doesn't recognise me in the least. Nor does Nelly either. Perhaps she will not."

Sir Pierce looked, in truth, very old, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the pains he had taken to look young. His tall lean figure drooped, and he leant heavily upon his cane as he walked, or rather tottered along. He was fashionably dressed, wore a flower in his button-hole, tight lavender-coloured gloves, and a very glossy hat. The pallor of his hollow wrinkled face was intensified by the dark dye of his moustache, the jet black curls of his wig. His eyes were dim and glazed with age; his movements were tremulous and uncertain; there was a suspicion of paralysis in the dragging method of his gait. The muscles of his face twitched curiously as he spoke, and his limbs jerked abruptly, imitative, or emulous, perhaps, of the jaunty restlessness of youth.

Eleanor Challoner was a faded, careworn woman, nervous, and always painfully anxious, as it seemed, concerning her father. Her sad eyes watched him unceasingly; her hand was constantly extended towards him,

in case he should have need of her feeble assistance.

"You—ah—you know this portrait?" asked Sir Pierce of Jack Osborne.

"I do. It is the photograph of a dead child."

"There is no trick——"

"Father!" interposed Eleanor.

"Pardon me, Eleanor. This—ah—this gentleman," he surveyed the photographer, as though doubting the perfect correctness of this description of him. "This gentleman," he repeated, "will understand me. Imposture is so rife in the world, we may be excused for being incredulous—ah—a trifle incredulous on almost every occasion. It seemed to me not impossible—I will even say not improbable—that this—ah—this photograph was designed to be a means of extorting money—ah—under false pretences."

"Father!" Miss Challoner again interposed.

"Pardon me, Eleanor," Sir Pierce repeated; "it is necessary—ah—very necessary to be explicit. You say this is the photograph of a dead child?"

"Without doubt."

"But you are not aware whose child?"

"I have not said that. The child is the child of Hugh Challoner."

Sir Pierce started back, he was unprepared for so sudden a statement. Miss Challoner hastened to proffer him support; with a wave of his hand he signified that he did not need assistance.

"You have been told that this is the child of Hugh Challoner?"

"I know that this is the child of Hugh Challoner."

"May I venture to ask your authority?"

"My authority is Hugh Challoner himself."

"Ah! You have seen him then?"

"Yes. He brought the dead child here in his arms. It rested upon that pillow. Those draperies were arranged about it."

The eyes of Sir Pierce and his daughter fell, with a sort of sad interest, upon the objects pointed out by the photographer.

"Hugh Challoner is my son, my only son," the old man said at last, in a faint tone. He made strenuous efforts to appear calm and at ease, but it was plain that he was painfully agitated. "The dead child was my grandson. I wished to be sure that there was no misapprehension, or—ah—fraud in the matter; for fraud is always possible, you know, and we are all liable to misapprehension. I am sorry—ah—if

I have seemed too peremptory, or—ah—too particular in my enquiries.”

His affected manner of speech had become perhaps too fixed a habit to be readily altered; otherwise a change had come over him. He had relaxed his efforts to appear young; his sprightly airs had vanished; he seemed to confess himself a very old man, broken and decrepid.

“Eleanor,” he said, “give this—this—ah—gentleman one of my cards, and—ah—one of your own. I wish him to know who I am. I wish him to know that we were not brought here by mere curiosity—ah—mere idle curiosity. I am Sir Pierce Challoner, sir, of Stoke Deverill, Devonshire, and of Portman Square. I sat in Parliament many years, sir, as Member for Stoke Deverill, until it was disfranchised—ah—by one of their infernal reform bills. This is my daughter, sir—Eleanor—my sole surviving daughter. I hope, I’m sure—ah—that we may have the pleasure of meeting you—down in Devonshire—down in Devonshire.” He appeared to have lost the subject of his speech, gazed about rather vacantly, and then turned helplessly to his daughter. “What was I saying, my dear? What did I come here to say?”

“It was about Hugh, father dear,” she said softly.

“Ah, yes—true; about Hugh. My son Hugh. He was a promising boy, sir; a very fine young man. But—ah—the fact is—yes, I remember—we’ve not met for some years, not for many years. I—ah—found it necessary to dismiss him the house, and, in fact, to disown him. He has been punished, as I have reason to believe. And he deserved to be punished. He had disobeyed me. I warned him of the result of his folly; but he took upon himself to dispute my authority and to defy me. He married beneath him—his sister’s governess—a young woman—”

“She is dead, father,” interposed Eleanor.

“As you observe, my dear, she is dead. I will only say of her, therefore, that she was not my son’s equal. I told him that I would never give my sanction to such an union. I told Hugh in the plainest terms that, if he married that woman, he should never darken my door again; that he should never more be regarded or treated by me as my son; that all would be over between us; that, in fact, I would disown and cast him off forever. As I

said before, I am a man of my word. I have kept my word.

“He has led a miserable life,” Sir Pierce resumed, after a pause; “a miserable life, as I happen to know. He endeavoured to support himself by his pen. I have heard of him, accidentally, from time to time. Now he was a teacher of languages, now he was seeking employment as a clerk, and so on; a wretched life. He wrote to me from time to time. I seldom read his letters; I usually destroyed them without opening them. Then I learnt—I scarcely know how now—that his wife was dead, and that he was in great want. I am a man of my word. I could not see him; but I offered to help him thus far—I would adopt the child that had been born to him. Hugh is my only son, as I said. My estates are not entailed. I offered to adopt my grandchild, and to appoint him my heir. I would have bequeathed him my whole property. I would even have departed, in a measure, from my original purpose, and settled upon Hugh some small allowance that would have saved him from absolute want. Would you believe it? He was so mad as to refuse my offer. He avowed that he was so fond of his boy he could not be parted from him. It was monstrous!”

“Some fathers are like that,” said the photographer calmly.

“What is the consequence? The child is dead.” He stopped abruptly, as though overcome with grief, or because mental infirmity had deprived him of power to express himself further. “Is there anything more I had to say, Eleanor?” he enquired, after a pause, turning with some effort to his daughter.

She whispered in his ear,

“I can’t hear you,” he said impatiently. “What? Ah! yes—true! The body of the child. I should wish,” he continued, addressing himself to Jack Osborne, “the remains of my unfortunate grandchild to be interred in the family-vault of the Challoners, in the abbey church of Stoke Deverill. I desire to pay every honour to his memory. I deeply lament his loss.”

“As to that, I apprehend you must address yourself to the child’s father. He is very poor, as you know. He had designed to bury his poor little one after a simple fashion—as cheaply as possible in the nearest churchyard.”

“That must not be.”

“Pardon me; that will be for him to decide, I think. He is the father in this

case, you see. It is his child that is in question. If it be his pleasure that his son shall lie in a pauper's grave——"

"A pauper's grave! My grandson! How dare you, sir. Where is this man, my son, to be found?"

"He lives but a little way from here."

"Let us go to him, father, at once," urged Miss Challoner.

"I will not see him, Eleanor. I will not speak to him. I have sworn I would not, and I will not. I am a man of my word."

Sir Pierce climbed back into his carriage, receiving considerable assistance from the powdered footman. Jack Osborne led the way on foot—the carriage following slowly—over the canal-bridge and down by the gasworks.

"What a neighbourhood!" murmured Sir Pierce. "Can it be that people really live in such places?"

It seemed the custom in Purton's Rents to leave the doors open both day and night, for whoever listed to enter without loss of time in plying bell or knocker. Certainly there was little there to tempt the dishonest, or, for that matter, the honest either. Only imperative necessity could have driven anyone towards a place so squalid, and miserable, and woebegone.

"You will not expect me to see him, Eleanor?"

"It shall be as you wish, dear," she said. "Only——"

"You're not frightened, Eleanor?"

"A little frightened."

"There is nothing to fear, my dear. But certainly it's a horrible place."

"Poor Hugh!"

"I'll not see him, Eleanor; remember that."

They were following Jack Osborne up a shattered staircase, to the room on the second floor. Osborne entered alone. All was very still.

"What a place!" Sir Pierce murmured again. He stood on the landing, waving a scented handkerchief to and fro—dabbing his white lips with it.

Osborne reappeared. His manner had changed; there was a scared look upon his face, and he spoke in a whispering tone.

"Come," he said to Miss Challoner.

"I may go?" she asked, turning to Sir Pierce.

"Yes. Let it be so. I will wait for you here. I'll not see him."

She entered the room, Jack Osborne leading her; for it was very dark. Her

hand rested on his arm. He felt that she was trembling violently.

"Hugh," she said softly. "Hugh—my brother. It is I—Nelly. Where is he?"

Hugh Challoner was seen to be lying upon his ragged pallet. He was only partially clad; it was as though he had fallen asleep in the act of undressing for the night. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his feet were bare. He lay sideways, turned away from the light, his arm curled beneath his head. His pillow was the coffin of his child.

"He sleeps very soundly," said Miss Challoner, with a throb of fear in her voice.

"Very soundly." Presently Jack Osborne asked: "Is it possible that you do not understand? Hugh Challoner will never waken more in this world. He has gone to rejoin his wife and his child. He has been dead many hours."

"Dead!" she gasped.

"Dead," he repeated. "He has nothing further to fear or to hope from his offended relations, or the cruelty of the world."

"What is the matter, Eleanor?" demanded Sir Pierce, querulously, from his post outside the door. "What has happened? Why do you not speak to me? Why am I kept waiting like this?"

"We have come too late; that is the matter," she said, in a broken voice. But for Osborne's support she would have fallen. "Hugh is dead."

"Really dead? And in such a place as this? I may see him now, I think. It will not be considered that I have broken my word." He was led to the body of his son.

"And the little one lies in that coffin? Is it possible. So wretched a coffin, too. What was Hugh thinking about? How poor he must have been! What they must have suffered! You will understand—ah—Mr.—I forget your name for the moment—that I never contemplated things coming to such a pass as this. I am very sorry indeed that things have happened in this way. But, you see, my son disobeyed and defied me. And—I am a man of my word. However, all's over now." He staggered as he spoke, and leant for support against the grimy greasy wall. "I grow faint in this dreadful place. Let us go home, Eleanor. We can do nothing here."

With an effort he seemed to regain control of himself. He perceived, possibly, his daughter's weak and fainting state, and her need of his assistance.

"Everything that is proper and becoming shall be done. Hugh and his son shall lie in the abbey church. I am sorry, very sorry," he repeated, "that things should have happened in this way. You believe that I am sorry, Eleanor?"

"Yes, father."

"Courage, my dear."

They re-entered the carriage, and were driven quickly from Parton's Rents. For some time neither spoke.

"There's one thing I—ah—forgot," said Sir Pierce, presently. "I forgot to thank that man for his attention and civility. He was of real service to us. I forgot his name. He was not a gentleman, of course; but he was certainly obliging, and, for his station, his manners were really superior. I fully meant to have offered him some small reward for his—ah—his assistance and sympathy. Somehow his face reminded me of someone I had seen or known before, a long time ago. Did you notice him, Eleanor?"

"I scarcely noticed him. I should not know him again. There were other things to think of."

"True, true," said Sir Pierce. "You mean poor Hugh and his child. Yes, of course. But—Osborne—that was the name, my dear—Osborne. Surely we used to know once some people of the name of Osborne."

Again they were silent. Suddenly a strange hoarse cry broke from Sir Pierce. There was a drawn distorted look upon his yellow-white face; a deadly glazed sightlessness about his eyes; his hands twitched and wrestled convulsively. He rolled or slipped from his seat on to the floor of the carriage, crushing his glossy hat ruinously in his fall.

"She did not know me, had completely forgotten me, that's the simple truth. And how she's changed! And how lovely she was once! Well, we've arrived at the very last chapter of that romance. Let us close the book, and fling it away from us for good and all."

The photographer was sitting in his studio, smoking his black short pipe. He took up a newspaper.

"What's this?" he cried. And he read: "On the 12th inst., of paralysis, Sir Pierce Christian Dalrymple Chaloner, Bart., of Portman Square, and Stoke Deverhill, Devonshire, in the seventy-seventh year of his age." In another column was to be found a brief biography of the

lamented gentleman, setting forth the facts of his life and his claims to distinction. It was stated further that the baronetcy was believed to be extinct.

"I wish I had taken his photograph," mused Jack Osborne. "After all, he was somebody. A swell in his way, and prodigiously obstinate. Moreover, he was poor Hugh's father; and the last baronet. Curious people, those Challoners!"

TINA.

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND.

I WAS up in my own little chamber putting the finishing touches to a bit of carving, which was my work. It was rather late for improvements; the carving was the frame of a hand-mirror, and already the mirror was in its place among the sculptured birds and flowers; but I touched and re-touched, and was hard to please, for was it not my wedding-gift to Donato's bride?

I leaned from my small window the better to view my handicraft. Around me were the village fruit-trees laden for harvest, the brazen campanile glittering in the declining sun; above me, girdles of olive and purple pines; still higher, the green Alps backed by keen ice-peaks, harsh yet beautiful, like fierce white teeth biting at the blue of the heavens.

In the mirror I saw my own face, small and pale, with large dark eyes, and feverish parted lips, the vine-leaves of my window trembling round it joyously. An unloved, wild, longing little face, it looked to me, but able to keep its sorrow out of sight. I passed my hand pityingly over my cheeks, and shifted the mirror so that it caught only the blue of heaven, and then I saw in it quite another countenance, fair and large, with crisp glowing hair, more like rust than gold, and eyes full of the colour of the mist behind the pines. It was the face of Elisabetta, of her for whom the mirror had been designed.

The sunlight flashed itself away behind the pines, burnt a minute on the ice-peaks, and vanished. The deep twilight descended upon me, the stars came out in the purple sky, and I heard a voice calling up to my window:

"Little Tina, come down out of the clouds, and sing to me. I have mended your zither, and you have no longer an excuse."

It was Donato calling; I put away the

mirror, and went down the little wooden staircase. In the kitchen his mother was sitting knitting, with the supper spread on the table near her; and outside, Donato was leaning against the vine-posts, with my zither in his hands.

"What shall I sing?" I asked, taking it from him and touching it.

"Something about love," he said, turning his bright bronze face to me with a happy glow upon it.

I turned away, and looked down the purple gorge beneath us, then up to the white peaks, to the stars. My heart shook and sank, then rose to its task as a melody came to me. Touching the strings, I uttered a few soft notes, chanted a restless recitative, and then broke into a wild, strange, joyous song, which sank suddenly into a broken minor, and ended abruptly.

"Where did you learn it?" he asked, looking at me keenly.

"The gipsies sang something like it when they were here last week. It has been ringing through my head ever since. I have only a few scraps of the words, you see."

"Why did you sob upon the last note, cara?" he asked kindly. "Was that, too, a part of the gipsy's song?"

"Her baby had died the week before, and still she was obliged to sing. Is it not enough to make one sob?"

He looked a little surprised, then took the zither and began to strum. I loved to hear Donato strumming. He turned his warm bright face to the stars, and hummed and strummed. Everyone loved Donato. He was so tall and strong, so merry and sweet-tempered, so good to animals and little children. I do not know how to describe his goodliness, but anybody would have loved Donato.

"I am going to see Elisabetta," he said presently. "Go in to your supper, little Tina, and tell the mother that I shall sup with my bride."

After supper I sat with my cheek in my hand looking out of the doorway. "Mother," I said, "I am thinking of going down into the world to seek my fortune."

Donato's mother dropped her knitting. She had cherished me in her home ever since, at the death of my parents, I had been left forlorn to the care of the village. I called her "mother" as Donato did; but now I felt that it was time to seek a way of my own.

"Tina!" she cried. "A little young thing like you! Ah, I fear you no longer love us!"

"All my heart will be left behind with you," I cried vehemently. "I am not ungrateful—I should die of it if I were. But Elisabetta is coming, you know, mother; and the house is more roomy for three than for four."

"Go to bed," said the dear old woman; "but first ask Heaven's pardon for having vexed me. How do I know what Elisabetta will be to me?"

I wept myself to sleep, but awoke to see one large bright star shining in my little mirror, which was hanging by the window. It looked to me like Elisabetta's beautiful face, and I closed my eyes and turned to the wall. Suddenly I became aware, by an unaccountable feeling, that Donato was not in the house; and dressing, I went down, and found his door lying open. I knew by the stars that it was morning, and I went out to attend to my goats. The way between our house and Elisabetta's was slippery and steep, and my heart welled up with misgiving. A man came past, and stopped to speak to me.

"What is Donato about? He was to have met me half-an-hour ago, to set out for the chamois-hunting."

"He has not been home," I said, "not since last night."

"I left him a piece on the way home," said the man; and his face changed.

I put up my hands to my head.

"Now, you little Tina, don't scream out and alarm his mother," said Tomaso, eagerly. "I'll get to work with some other fellows at once. There's an ugly slip—but, Madonna! is he not a chamois-hunter?"

My face became cold, and all the waterfalls seemed to overflow and hiss in my ears. Tomaso vanished, and I fell on the ground. Donato, Donato, Donato! Lying at the bottom of the gorge, mangled and dead, like our dove that a kite let fall the other morning!

The next hours I spent holding the mother in my arms, and whispering hope that was no hope to myself. About noon all the men in the village had gone to look for Donato, when suddenly we heard a cheer. We knew it was for good news, and the mother fainted away.

They brought him in, bruised and bandaged; a leg and arm were fractured, and there was an ugly wound upon his handsome face. They set his bones—awkwardly, as it proved—and a tedious fever seized upon him. Elisabetta arrived in gay attire, with more annoyance

than sorrow on her exquisite face; wept and sighed a little when she saw that he did not recognise her, and afterwards, up in my little chamber, bemoaned the untimeliness of the accident.

"Only think," she said; "our preparations all made for the wedding! Was anything ever so unlucky?"

"It will cost you another feast," I said.

"That it will!" shrugging her shoulders. "And, oh Caterina, do you think he will be maimed or scarred?"

"No one can tell," I said sadly; "but, whether or no, he will still be the Donato that you love."

"I will not say that; I did not promise to marry a cripple." And then her eye caught sight of my mirror, which she knew I had been preparing for herself. "You good little creature! I may as well take it with me;" and, slinging it to her waist, she took her leave.

Donato slowly grew better; but there was a scar on his face, and he was terribly lame. Limping on a crutch, he would go as far as he could to meet Elisabetta when she came to see him; but these occasions grew scarcer day by day, for the beauty did not care for an unsightly lover. He was pale and thin, and disfigured by a scar, and she took no pains to conceal her disgust at the change. She sulked, and was silent when they met; and evening after evening Donato would sit brooding on the bench under our vines, never saying a word about the zither or a song.

"Tina!" he called to me one evening. He knew I was near, though I was not in sight. I was knitting and weeping in the shadows against the gable. "Tina," he said, "you are a wise little thing. Do you think the love of a woman is likely to change?"

"Of some, Donato. But there are women and women; though men will talk as if all were the same."

"Of the best, then?"

"The love of a true woman will never change," I said eagerly, "until she changes herself—into the dust."

"Good little comforter! Elisabetta is of the best, and I am an idiot to fear she is ceasing to care for me. No wonder she should be shocked at my appearance. A cripple on a crutch, instead of her daring chamois-hunter! But I will never ask to wed her till Heaven restores my strength. If I could only see a physician, I should get well."

I knew Elisabetta was encouraging

another lover, but I feared to tell him, lest the news should break his heart.

I thought a great deal of what he had said about a physician, and his mother spoke to me of it weeping.

"How can we, up in the mountains, ever see such a man?" she said. "If I were younger, I would go down with him to the towns; but I am old and useless, and my boy has no one else."

"Mother!" I exclaimed, "I am not old. I will take him down through the mountains, and we will look for the physicians."

"You, child!" she said, and shook her head. "You are too young; and, besides, you are not his mother or his sister."

"I swear that I am his sister," I cried vehemently. "Have I not always been his sister? Do I not always call you mother?"

Donato refused to listen to my proposal at first, but the idea made him wistful, and little by little he came to look on our journey as a thing that might be accomplished. We could ride when we got a chance, and stop at a wayside village when we needed to rest. The hope took root in his mind, and would not be cast out. I silently made my preparations, and said to him brightly one day:

"Well then, Donato, let us set out to-morrow morning!"

"You are an angel, little Tina," he said radiantly, and the mother followed us with her blessings all down the winding road. We called at Elisabetta's house, but the beauty was away at some merry-making; "with a newer sweetheart," whispered her sister to me. And so we went on our way without his having bade her good-bye.

"No matter," said Donato, recovering from his disappointment. "When she sees me again she will be proud of me."

We got along but slowly. Donato was weak, and he limped sadly, and yet he would not lean on me, only laying his hand at times on my shoulder to make me fancy that I helped him. All that morning I chattered to him merrily; my heart rose and danced in my breast, for was I not going to make him well—I, little Tina, who owed him everything in the world? As I looked back on the heights we were leaving, I felt it good to have got him away into my own hands, out of reach of all pain from Elisabetta. I knew the time would come when I should have to lead him back to her, but of that I did not allow myself to think. At present he was my child, my nursing, depending on me for every present good and every future hope. Let the

time to come take care of itself; I only had to take care of Donato.

About midday we arrived at a little wayside house. The sun was hot, and we were dusty and thirsty.

"My brother is weak," I said, "and we are travelling to find the doctors. Will you allow him to rest on a bed for a few hours? I will play for the children, and they shall dance."

I began to play, and the little black-eyed elves pointed their toes and lifted their skirts. I played a fast whirling dance, snapping my fingers, and singing a few notes to give zest and variety to the performance. At parts of the dance we all laughed wildly in chorus. The children were crazy with glee, the elders clapped hands and urged on the fun. Donato, having rested, limped into the midst of it.

"Why," he said, "I have not seen you so merry for a long time, little Tina! But I hope you have also had a rest."

"I was not so tired as you," I said gaily, and the children danced on while the mother placed the supper-table under a chestnut tree, and Donato and I were invited to eat.

"You have earned your supper," said the woman kindly; and, as we ate, the sun began to set, and a great fringe of gold swept the dark pines upon the nearest height. Behind the pines and under the gold veil, I knew Donato saw the face of Elisabetta, for he gazed upward with that strange look, part pain, part anger, and part gladness, which always troubled his face when he thought of her. Also he asked me for a song; and I knew what that meant too.

A lump rose in my throat; a great wild unhappiness came over me; I had brought him so far, and I had been glad; but his heart had gone back to Elisabetta.

"I will give you a subject," said our hostess, quickly. "One of our neighbours has jilted her faithful lover."

I touched the zither, and turned away my face from Donato, for I did not want to wound him by showing through my eyes that I sang my song of anyone we knew. I began in a low voice trembling with indignation, but what I sang I do not now remember. I know that my face burned, and I quivered all over as I poured out my scorn for the woman who had falsified her troth. The glow went out of the sky while I sang; as I finished the twilight fell; and we sat in a world of

purple stillness, overhung by ghostly heights, and roofed with stars.

Our hosts applauded, and we were pressed to stay longer, but I slung my zither on my shoulder, and bade them good-bye, with a lip that still trembled.

"The moon is rising," I said, "the night is short and refreshing. It is better for him to rest in the heats, and travel in the coolness. The way is not bad, and we shall have plenty of light."

We walked along in silence; the moon shone big and bright; the Alps were veiled in silver gossamers; the gigantic shadows below stretched long wild arms upward; the tall magnificence of the pines had become black and awful. I knew well that Donato was angry with me. Elisabetta's golden head and melting eyes had shone out of my song and betrayed me. In the passion of the moment I had denounced her.

"Why do you judge her so harshly?" he asked.

A storm arose within me as I thought of her merry-making with her lovers, while this pale sad face would keep looking back at her forever over the shoulder. He had so far to travel, so many miles yet to remove himself away from her, so much to suffer before he could return to her with hope. And she, I knew, never thought of him at all. Should he return as he went, how she would scorn his faithful heart; if, indeed, we did not find her already a wife.

But I could not bear to grieve him, who was here beside me in the bitterness of his trouble, and who, after all, had nobody but me.

"I do not want to judge her," I said gently. "You know well that I wish her to be true."

And so we journeyed on; and he laughed at me, as we rounded a corner of the road and I shrank in fright from the glittering apparition of a torrent, looking like the genius of our mountains, gliding by night, and shrouded in a silver veil. When I heard him laugh, my heart rose, and I held by his hand as we went deeper into the mysterious shadows at our feet. And we quarrelled no more, till one bright morning found us standing on the brink of a precipice, in the sunrise, looking down into the gardens of Italy.

Step by step we descended through the bloom, while our mountains rose higher and higher in blue walls around us, at last falling back, and leaving us among the flowers in a fruit-scented plain. Neither

of us had ever been down in the plains before, and so it was all enchantment to us; though our feet were blistered, and we could hardly take a step without pain.

Little by little we left the blue ramparts behind us, and crept along the roads; resting at all the villages, and sometimes breakfasting or supping delightfully in a wayside garden, or bathing our feet in the stream of some shaded grove. We were welcomed everywhere, for all the people pitied and admired Donato, and were glad of a song from his little sister. Besides, we said our prayers at every shrine; and so the angels took care of us, of course.

At dawn one morning we entered the city for which we were bound, and made our way straight to the Duomo. Sitting on some steps, we wondered at the glory of the great coloured windows, and felt as if we had died and gone to heaven unawares. As soon as possible I found a lodging for Donato, and, having left him to rest, went to see about the doctors at once.

"It will be a troublesome affair," said our landlady, pityingly. "Doctors make long bills, I can tell you."

I showed her all the money we possessed, but she said it would not nearly be enough. I went out and made enquiries; and I had to weep out my heart in a corner of the Duomo before I ventured home again to Donato.

I set about trying to earn some money. In the evenings I sang on the Corso, and in the great arcades where ladies and gentlemen ate ices after their drive; I but only made enough to help with the expenses of our living in the town. It seemed to grow more and more impossible that I could ever obtain the fees for Donato's cure.

There was a pretty trinket shop in one of the arcades, right before the spot where I usually sang. All sorts of beautiful things sparkled in the window under the lamps, and a tall man used always to come out of the doorway to listen to my song. On one occasion he stepped out suddenly, and, going round the company with a little shiny saucer, he emptied a heap of coins into my apron. The next night he brought me a box of sweetmeats, which I was very nearly swallowing, when I remembered to control myself.

"Will you allow me to take them home to Donato?" I said.

"Who is Donato?" he asked, with a smile.

"My brother," I said, "who is ill and lamed."

He came with me himself and presented the sweetmeats to Donato, who was glad to see a friend in his little room. Pietro was a tall dark man—darker than our mountain people, and looking a little hard, although he was so kind. Every evening after that he came to visit us, and always brought some nice little treat for Donato; for he was a wealthy man, with a whole shopful of beautiful things.

One evening he asked me to step into his shop, and offered to clasp a necklace round my throat.

"I cannot take it," I said, shrinking back. "You already do too much for my brother, my friend; but I would rather keep your kindness for him."

"Never was a sister so devoted to a brother," he said; but he put the necklace back into its case. When I told Donato of all this he frowned.

"And you do not wish to wear the fellow's baubles, little one?" he asked, looking at me anxiously.

"No," I replied readily, laughing for joy because Donato had cared.

The following night Pietro came out of his shop with a bunch of roses.

"Oh," I cried, "for Donato!" and stretched out my hands for them eagerly.

"Donato, Donato!" he said, "always Donato! Do come for a walk with me, and let your brother wait for once."

I could not refuse, having already almost hurt him about the necklace, and away we walked into the moonlight out of the noise and glare of the arcades. I felt strange and uncomfortable walking side by side with that black Pietro, but this mattered little as Donato had found him so kind.

"Tina," he began suddenly, and the tone of his voice startled me at once.

"I know you are a good little girl," he went on, "innocent and true, like the people of your mountains. I have always wished for such a girl for my wife. When your brother goes home, I want you to stay here with me."

"Oh no," I said breathlessly. "At least, you are very good, but I could not think of deserting my brother."

"Sisters do not stick to their brothers forever," he said laughing; "and your brother will not need you when he gets well and goes home."

"How can he get well?" I cried sadly. "We came to look for the doctors, but we did not know the money they would cost."

I fear poor Donato must limp back as he came."

Pietro did not answer, and we walked on in silence for some minutes.

"Come, little Tina, he said presently, in a tone of determination, "let us make a bargain on the spot. I will give you the money for the doctors, and when Donato is cured, you will become my wife."

"Oh no, no!" I exclaimed wildly; and the world reeled round me as I saw what a temptation had opened at my feet. Donato could be cured. I could do it. And yet here I was refusing, as if I had been his enemy. My hands went up to my throat, for I felt like to choke.

"Take time to think of it," said Pietro. "I do not wonder you are astonished. I am a rich man, and you are a poor girl; but I am not proud, and I would rather have you than any other I know with a fortune."

"You are very good," I gasped.

"I will be very good to you," he said eagerly; "you shall have trinkets and pretty dresses, and a servant to wait upon you. And when your brother is quite strong, he can sometimes come to see us."

I grew every moment weaker and more bewildered. We found ourselves at the steps of the Duomo, and I seized the opportunity to make my escape.

"It is late," I said, "and I want to say my prayers. Ask me no more at present. Good-night!"

"I shall see you again to-morrow evening," he said, and squeezed my hands and went away.

I lifted the heavy curtain and went into the Duomo, and stood among the vast marble pillars like a blade of grass among the trees of the forest. A golden gleam touched the lilies and fruit upon the pillars above my head; away in the distance I saw crimson and purple, and pale lamps that glowed like moons. I slid down till I lay with my face upon the pavement, forlorn, miserable, and rebellious, fighting with my heart till there was no strength left in me, body or soul. Through all my struggling, I knew what it was that was coming upon me. With all my might I declared that Donato must be cured. Had I not walked from the mountains for him with aching limbs and blistered feet; would I not cheerfully have died to put him safely into the doctor's hands; and now was I going to fail him, because something was required of me

more difficult than travel or death? I knew that in the end I would not fail; and yet I struggled still, and had to go on with my arguments.

Had I not already resolved to return to the city as soon as Donato and Elisabetta were married, and what did it matter to anyone, whether I married or lived single, starved in a garret, or wore trinkets in Pietro's shop?

"But," said my heart, "Donato might not marry Elisabetta after all; she being far more likely to have married before his return. And in that case, might I not have lived a little longer with him and with his mother as before?"

I walked home with these thoughts buzzing in my head. Donato noticed my pale face and strange eyes. I said I was tired, and crept away to the little attic where I had my bed; and as I lay there, staring at the stars, I saw clearly again that Donato must be cured. With his future I could have nothing to do, further than sending him to meet it, whole of limb, and sound in health. This much the angels had appointed for me; and, afterwards, I would give him over into their hands.

Next evening, I was singing on the Corso, when through the dusk I saw Pietro coming towards me, with his hands full of flowers. My song died on my lips, and the people moved away thinking I was ill or out of humour. I bent over my zither shivering; and yet I did not dislike Pietro, whom I felt to be kind. Only it seemed that every step he made towards me was opening a gulf between me and my mountains and Donato.

"Well, little Tina," he said triumphantly, filling my hands with crimson blossoms. "You see I have come for my answer."

"Let it be as you said," I replied, hurrying to say the words, lest afterwards they should refuse to come. "But first, you must let me take Donato home. I shall want to say good-bye to my mother."

Pietro's face darkened, and he looked displeased.

"How could I be sure that you would ever come back to me?" he grumbled.

"I never break my word," I answered sadly.

"Well, then, you shall have your way," he said, after some reflection. "And perhaps, who knows, I may take holiday and fetch you."

"There is another thing I want to insist upon," I said. "You must not tell a word

of all this to my brother. When we get back to the mountains I will let him know it all."

"You think he would not agree; you believe him to be a fool!" cried Pietro, with indignation.

"I do not say that," I said wistfully; "but I have a notion that, if he knew it, he might spoil our plans."

And Pietro consented to be silent on our compact.

The following day Donato's cure began. The doctors understood his case, and promised to make him well; and Pietro paid their fees. Donato accepted the money as a loan, and was full of astonishment at the stranger's generous kindness.

Day after day, as I sat by his side, he talked to me of the efforts he would make to pay off the debt. Sometimes the thought of it overcast his cheerfulness, and then I found it hard not to tell him the truth; but I felt instinctively that he would be still more troubled at knowing I had been put in such a strait. For how could I pretend to him that Pietro was the husband of my choice?

Weeks passed; the doctors did their work, and I sang on the Corso every evening. I worked at wood-carving in the daytime, and altogether earned enough money for our support; accepting nothing from Pietro but the fees, which had been the matter of our agreement. Donato, feeling himself grow daily stronger, began to talk joyfully of our return. Sometimes he mentioned Elisabetta, but not so often as he used to do; and always with a look of anxiety on his face.

"He begins to fear that she has already deserted him," I thought; and now that he was looking like our Donato of old, I felt less sure that there was cause for his fears.

"Have courage, my brother!" I said, looking up brightly from my carving. "Your body is getting well; do not let your heart now get sick!"

He gave me a long grave look, which made me tremble all over, fearing he had guessed my secret; but he only said:

"I wonder did any woman ever do more for any man, than you have done for me, my Tina! You have wasted your strength, your beauty——"

"My beauty!" I cried aghast. Never had I heard such a thing mentioned before.

"Yes," he persisted, "your beauty. However, it is not gone yet, carina. Your eyes are too large, and your cheeks are too

white; but the mountain air will bring back your roses."

I smiled; while nevertheless a great stroke of sorrow clove my heart. I thought of our last days together journeying back, and of my return in my loneliness with Pietro. A little while longer, and my way would lie no more among the heights.

More weeks flew, Donato walked without crutches, and the ruddy bronze had returned to his face. The weather was deliciously cool, though winter had not yet set in; and we began to talk freely of our return to the mountains.

At last, one morning we set out, and Pietro walked a good part of the way with us. He had brought me, as usual, some roses, and looked pained and saddened when we bade him farewell.

"Remember your promise, little Tina," he said, at parting.

"What does he mean by your promise?" asked Donato, as we walked along, he holding me by the hand, like a child that had tired itself more than enough, and had now to be led tenderly home.

"I promised to be glad to see him," I said, "when he comes to pay a visit to our mountains."

Donato flushed and frowned; and I was vexed at not having hit on something better to say. I feared he might think Pietro was uneasy about his money.

"He is not at all anxious about the debt, however," I added. "He knows well that that will be paid."

"Of course he does," said Donato, "and I was not thinking about the debt. Tina, you are not thinking of marrying him?"

"Why should he wish me to marry him?" I said sadly. And though this was an evasion, it was also a question I was weary of asking myself. "Don't you see that I am coming back to the mountains?"

"Yes, you are coming back," he said, holding my hand more tightly.

As we went along I was no longer gay and angry by turns, as formerly, only spiritless and tired. Donato was now so strong and well, that he did not need my cheering; and when my songs died in my throat, he would play on the zither in his old merry fashion, shouting out his roundelays to the rocks and pines. He tenderly cared for me, as a nurse cares for a child, carrying me over the rough places, and seeking a draught of milk for me at

every opportunity. Higher and higher we rose into our sweet, blue native air, and the city with its crowds, and Pietro with his roses, all faded away, as if only known in a dream. Yet I never forgot what was before me, and that I was living my last moments by Donato's side.

As we came nearer to our home, Elisabetta's golden head began to glimmer among the sunbeams, and her eyes began to peer at me through the branches of the pines. But I was no longer jealous of her as I had used to be; only anxious to find that she was true. I felt that, when I must descend the mountains into sorrow with Pietro, it would comfort me to know that Donato was happy in his home.

We ascended the last steep in the purple dusk, and smelt the burning wood, and saw the fires of our village shining red through the doorways. Donato almost carried me in to his mother, and laid me in her arms. Never shall I forget her scream of joy when she saw him standing straight and strong before her.

As we sat together after supper, all our stories told, each of us thought of the same person, but nobody spoke.

"How is Elisabetta?" asked Donato gravely, at last.

The mother's face changed. "She is well," she answered, "and she is not married. She expects you to go to visit her at once."

And after that I saw that Donato became restless.

All the next day I lay prostrate on my bed; but in the evening I crept down into the kitchen, and sat in quiet near the doorway, looking out upon the glaciers and the pines. The mother was gone to talk over her joyous news with a neighbour, and I was all alone, when Donato suddenly came in. I was surprised, for I knew that he had gone to Elisabetta.

He knelt down beside me and took both my hands in his.

"My love, my Tina," he said; "I can love nobody but you!"

"Donato!" I cried, frightened out of my wits.

"Yes," he said, half laughing and half sobbing, "I have seen Elisabetta, and she is a fool and a coquette. Her golden hair is brass, and her eyes are beads. But you are beautiful, my Tina, for the angels have lent you your face!"

"Donato," I cried, "you must have gone mad! Have you quarrelled with Elisabetta, and has she refused you?"

"She has not quarrelled with me, and it is I who refuse her. She has been engaged and jilted since I left her, yet she would marry me to-morrow if I will. But I will not, my Tina, for I love another woman!"

I felt that I had got a blow, and my mind grew dark; but in a few moments all became clear again.

"You are engaged to her," I said, "and I—I am engaged to Pietro."

Donato gave a cry, and flung his hands away from him. "You," he exclaimed, "you—you love that Pietro!"

"I do not love him," I said wearily; "but he is coming—he is coming—and he will not take your money, Donato."

"You mean to say that you sold yourself to make me well!"

I could not say anything. I only hung my head.

Elisabetta insisted on claiming her lover, and I, sobbing on Donato's breast, had repeated to him all that I had promised to Pietro. Pale, wild, and sad, we two each went our ways, and scarcely dared to speak to one another. The mother only smiled, and predicted that all would be well.

She went about, making it known to the neighbours how a wealthy merchant was coming up from the cities to marry little Tina. He was a dealer in jewels, and his wife would be like a queen. The girls listened eagerly, and Pietro's arrival was looked for with anxiety. Elisabetta questioned me closely as to his means, his age, his appearance, and especially about the trinkets in his shop; and her manner to Donato again became scornful. Then I began to get a glimmer of what the wise old mother meant.

Elisabetta was fond of walking on the road with her friends in the evenings, when the sun shone on her burnished hair, and her beauty cast her companions into the shade. So it happened that she was the first to meet Pietro as he wended up the steep, and in her mother's house he first broke our village bread.

Need I tell how his fancy for me disappeared before her smiles; or how she gained the double triumph of robbing little Tina of her lover, and wedding a husband who could cover her with trinkets?

Pietro came up to me one day, looking so penitent and ashamed, that my heart began to reel for joy. Elisabetta had bewitched him, and he begged to be set free.

He wished to remit the debt, but I assured him it would have to be paid.

When he was gone, I climbed to the overhanging rocks to meet Donato coming home from the hunting; and he heard my joyful singing, before he caught sight of me running along the level to be folded in his arms.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S REALITY.

BY C. WARREN ADAMS.

"You don't really mean, Captain Sherley, that your Government refuses to allow medicine to pass their lines!"

The speaker was the white-haired old colonel of H.M.'s —th Regiment, quartered in that summer of 186— at Bermuda, and host, at this present speaking, of Lieutenant Jonas P. Sherley, commanding U.S. gunboat Mohawk, one of the squadron engaged in the blockade of the Confederate ports. It must be confessed, however, that the private feelings, not only of the gallant colonel himself, but of the two dozen or so of officers who shared with him the honour of entertaining at the regimental mess-table the captain and officers of the foreign cruiser, were by no means in such entire harmony with their positions as might perhaps have been desired. It was not merely that that English tendency to take part with the weaker, altogether irrespectively of any merit of the quarrel, had ranged the sympathies of the gallant —th strongly on the Southern side. The personal qualifications of Captain Sherley himself were by no means calculated to create any counter prejudice in favour of the North. How such fellows ever managed to get commissions was a question which had been already mooted with some freedom, and to which that worthy and highly popular citizen of Philadelphia, Mr. Samuel C. Slithers, sworn ally of every good fellow in the Islands, could only reply with the readily-accepted assurance, there were not many of them, and with sundry enigmatic allusions to "wire-pulling," "log-rolling," and other electioneering mysteries, which, in the eyes of those who professed to understand them, seemed clearly more than capable of accounting for anything.

Captain Jonas P. Sherley had put into the Islands in an exceedingly crippled state, and would already have made for New York to refit, had it not

been for the almost simultaneous arrival of a most unmistakable blockade-runner, figuring on the Custom House books as the Mocking Bird of Liverpool, and bound from that port to the Havannah with a general cargo. Now, it had already leaked out that the most valuable, if not the bulkiest part of this general cargo, was a consignment of quinine; and a romantic story was afloat to the effect that the Mocking Bird herself had been chartered chiefly with the view of conveying this sorely needed supply to a certain spot on the Southern coast, and that the character was no less a person than beautiful Miss Helen Sinclair, only daughter of the wealthy Confederate Colonel Sinclair, whose visit to the Islands in his magnificent steam-yacht Ariel is still a pleasant and festive memory. To be told that the hospitable old Southern gentleman and his family were "down" with fever, that the handsome and high-spirited girl, toasted among them under the title of "Queen Helen," was herself risking all the perils of the blockade to carry succour to them, and that this Yankee was bent on intercepting the supply, and carrying off Queen Helen to a Northern prison, was a sore trial to the feelings of H.M.'s gallant —th.

"You don't really mean," says Colonel Murray, "that your Government forbids medicine to pass their lines?"

"Yes, sir!" replies the other, leaning back in his seat with an argumentative air. "I don't know how it may be in your overcrowded old country, but we find we've got quite varmin enough without preservin' on 'em."

"We don't call Miss Sinclair and her father vermin," strikes in a young ensign, rather hotly, and a murmur runs round the table, where general conversation has for the moment come rather to a stand. For the moment it almost seems as though the little controversy, of which the American captain is the centre, were about to assume unpleasant proportions.

Fortunately, the president's chair is occupied by a man who has not only more control over himself, but more personal influence over his juniors than any other officer in the regiment. Perhaps, if truth were known, Major Hamilton's feelings are at least as hotly interested in the controversy as those of anyone present. Certainly, he has for some time past been fingering the stem of his wineglass in a fashion that might readily be interpreted as indicative of a rather strong desire to fling

it at the Yankee's head. But, if such be the temptation before him, he resists it manfully; and just as the instant or two of silence which follows upon Captain Sherley's outburst is about to be broken by some still warmer rejoinder, casts instead the much needed oil upon the troubled waters of the discussion.

"I think we have had almost enough of this, gentlemen," he says. "Let us change the subject. Have you thought any more of our ball for next month, Colonel?"

So the subject is changed, and the evening comes to an end peaceably, and without violation of the laws of hospitality. And when it is over one of the young subs rushes hither and thither in anxious search for that universal referee and arbiter, Charlie Hamilton. But Charlie Hamilton is not to be found. Not to be found, that is to say, in the ante-room, or in his quarters, or any other ordinary "draw." If the anxious sub had bethought him of the quay, off which the Mocking Bird was moored, it is by no means impossible that he might have found him there.

In truth, Charlie Hamilton's interest in Helen Sinclair and her doings, were both of a warmer and tenderer kind than his comrades knew. That famous visit of the Ariel was not the only occasion on which they had met. There had been a happy, eventful, fatal, miserable month at Biarritz, during Charlie's last long leave, wherein handsome young aspirants to Queen Helen's favour—American, French, Spanish, and half-a-score others—learned to hate with a deadly hatred the quiet, "ugly" Englishman, who had so unexpectedly and audaciously carried off the prize. And then had come catastrophe and chaos. Among Helen Sinclair's numerous accomplishments, by no means the least striking was her performance in the water. Such a swimmer was scarcely recorded in the annals of Biarritz. Unfortunately, the costume there held sacred to this healthful exercise was far from recommending itself to Major Hamilton's fastidious English taste, and in an evil hour he broached his objection; perhaps a little too authoritatively. Queen Helen's southern pride flamed out on the spot, and from that day to this no word had been exchanged between them. Now he leaned upon a capstan-head, and looked out in the moonlight upon the long low steamer in which Helen—his Helen—was about to risk death, or, if not death, then what was in truth but little more in-

viting, captivity in the power of Captain Sherley, U.S.N., and was not long in making up his mind what to do. It was impossible to sue for his own forgiveness or press his own suit now; but he could be at hand to watch over her. Whether such watching would be likely to have much practical result was a question into which he hardly felt called upon to enter.

So by eight o'clock the next morning Charlie had already made his bargain with the worthy Scotch skipper of the blockade-running craft, now, as he found, likely to be still further detained, not only by the presence of the Mohawk, but by an untoward accident to her engineer, who had managed to get knocked on the head in a pothouse quarrel, and was lying in the hospital with small hope of recovery. The major had time, not only to get his leave and pack up his traps, but to devote a couple of days to the energetic dissemination of strictly confidential statements, to the effect that the original plan of the Mocking Bird had been abandoned, and that he was going in her to Charleston.

On the third morning came a sudden summons. Not only had the Mohawk disappeared from her awkward cruising-ground, but a substitute for the disabled engineer had suddenly turned up in the person of one Josiah Pickering, native, according to his own account, of Maryland, and undoubted deserter from the Mohawk, who, before sailing, had had parties ashore seeking him angrily in all directions. He was not a very prepossessing individual, but, as Captain McDonald justly observed, "a ragged bush is better than nae bield," and "a' arena' thieves that dogs bark at." So Mr. Josiah Pickering was duly engaged, and that night the Mocking Bird sailed.

All went well. No sign of the dreaded stars and stripes appeared anywhere; no trail of smoke blurred for a moment the clear sharp circle of the horizon. The Mohawk had evidently gone off upon the wrong scent, so carefully laid for her edification, and was, no doubt, at this moment, lying in wait for the Mocking Bird on the well-frequented track which led to Charleston. It was strange, certainly, that her commander, who knew so well the point to which all Helen Sinclair's thoughts must needs be tending, should not have divined the little vessel's true destination; or, at all events, have so far suspected it as to induce him at least to lie-to awhile in the offing, just to make

sure. But they were already many a long mile beyond the point at which any such manoeuvre on his part must necessarily have declared itself, and there was the Mocking Bird, well out of any of the ordinary blockade-running tracks, and already cutting her way merrily through the masses of gulf-weed, which every now and then came drifting across her path, and running up her westing at a rate which promised, if all went to the end as well as it had begun, to bring her to the mouth of Helen's dearly-loved stream in time to get across the bar before the sun went down.

But absolutely uninterrupted good fortune is too much to look for in this workaday world. Again and again the panting engines had to be slowed to avoid the risk of fouling the screw among the dense masses of weed. Twice the ship had to be hove-to altogether, and the boat lowered down, to clear away the soft clinging tendrils that choked up blade and shaft in their slimy yellow embrace. The second time, the new engineer, who had come on deck for a moment's breath and comparatively cool air, suggested that it would save time if she were left in the water. The captain, who himself was growing a trifle aggravated at these repeated contretemps, assented with a silent nod; and, without waiting for further orders, the man turned on his heel, swung himself down the engine-room hatch by the stanchions, without seeming to set foot on the ladder, and had the ship underway again, at full speed, almost before the two men in the boat had time to make fast her painter, and bundle themselves on board again over the taffrail.

So much time had been lost among those troublesome masses of weed, that the two low hummocks, which marked the entrance of the Catawba river, were still but dimly outlined on the horizon, when the great red sun sank down behind them, and the scorching tropic day was at an end. Even then, indeed, had the Catawba only been, as the Scotch skipper grimly remarked, "in any decent latitude," there would have been ample time for the little Mocking Bird, tearing along over the long oily swell at the rate of at least fifteen knots an hour, to find her way over the bar with daylight enough and to spare. But she had hardly covered three out of the ten or twelve which still separated her from the desired haven, ere the brief tropic twilight was at an end, and the darkness of a moonless night had settled fairly down.

Helen was in a fever. To be so near

the fruition of all her hopes, and now at the very last moment to meet with such a check as this, was really too much for human endurance. She even tried to persuade the captain to risk the passage of the bar by the light of the stars. Failing this, she begged hard for at least the loan of a boat. But the old skipper pointed to the long rolling swell, which had considerably increased within the last few hours, and declined.

Whereon my lady set her lips and intimated her purpose of swimming ashore by herself. To which determination the skipper offered no opposition; merely remarking that "Nae doot but a' the Almighty's creatures were made for some wise purpose; but that for himsel' he had never heard that shairks' lives were accounted sae valyable in these pairts, that it was worth a body's while to cocker them up with quinine." And then, while Helen was still divided between the irresistible feeling of vexation at being thus baffled at all points, and an equally irresistible inclination to laugh at her own discomfiture, the leadsman proclaimed that the limit of safe approach to the shore was reached, the throbbing of the engine ceased, the chain rattled hoarsely through the hawse-hole, and the Mocking Bird swung slowly round to the stream, to await the return of day.

"Shall we draw the fires, Captain McDonald?" asked the engineer.

The captain looked for a moment at the speaker, then slowly passed the knuckles of his bony hand across the point of his long keen nose, and gave vent to the low chuckle which was the only approach he seemed capable of making to a laugh, as he answered quietly:

"Eh! mon. 'Tis easy to see ye're no had muckle experience of this kind of wark. Ye'd be for histing a ridin' light I reckon, and firing a gun for a pilot. Na, na, mon. It's ill clipping the chuckies' wings whan the tod's abroad. Just dis-conneck yere screw and let her run, and keep as full a heid of steam as ere ye can, wi'out blowing-off like a grampus in his flurry. Hout!" he continued, as the engineer turned silently, and as it seemed, a little sullenly, to obey the order. "Dinna be fashed. Ye're no the first wha's fund himsel young at ae trade whan he's grawn auld in anither."

"I don't like the look of that fellow, Captain McDonald," observed Hamilton, as Pickering disappeared below.

The captain shook his head meditatively.

"Deed, sir," he replied, "I'm o' the same mind mysel."

And with that Captain McDonald in his turn betook himself below, to see with his own careful eyes that all was in due order; all lights extinguished or carefully masked, engines in good trim, cable all ready to slip at a moment's notice, and so forth. Then the anchor-watch was duly stationed, the helm lashed hard over, so as to give the ship's head something of a cant to seaward, and the word passed for the remainder of the crew to turn in "all standing," ready for action at an instant's warning, and except for the dull throbbing in the engine-room below, all was quiet.

The night was very dark. The stars shone, indeed, but not with the usual brilliancy of the tropics. It seemed as though some sort of vapour had risen from the land, now little more than a couple of miles distant, and without amounting to an actual mist, had sufficed to veil to some extent the ordinary glory of the southern sky. As though, however, to make amends, what the sky had lost in brilliancy, appeared to have been more than gained by the sea. No breath of wind ruffled its glossy surface, but as the ship rose and fell upon the long smooth roll, now dipping her low side almost to the gunwale, now raising it high out of the water, with a thousand tiny cascades streaming down it, every drop as it fell became a momentary diamond, flashing and sparkling with its own self-emitted lustre. Aft, where the current swirled away from the opposing breadth of the rudder, and the sharp angles of the motionless screw, a long milky-way of soft white vaporous fire streamed into the distant darkness, crossed and recrossed by a hundred wandering moons, weaving their mystic dance in ever widening curves, till they glided finally out of sight. Far down below the surface, great globes of silvery flame moved hither and thither, or slowly rose until from within gleamed the wavering outline of some ghostly fish. Once a huge shark, sheathed from snout to tail in sheeny armour, that would have more fitly become some dazzling prince of Fairyland, came gliding up to the very side of the silent ship, the tiny pilot-fish darting playfully about round his hideous head, like little flashes of summer lightning. Just at that moment a bigger wave than usual slipped from under her on its shoreward path. The ship rolled heavily over with a splash that for the moment churned her whole

length into a blaze, and the startled monster, springing half out of the water in his fright, sped away, like some huge sea comet, his little satellites streaming like tiny shooting stars in his wake.

"Bad luck to you for a cowardly brute!" muttered honest Dan Rorke, leaning with folded arms upon the bulwark on his solitary watch. "'Tis small chance ye'd be giving a poor divil that comed acrost ye widout so much as a bit of a shtick in his fist to defend himself, and look at ye now wid— Holy Vargin! what's that?" and Dan wheeled round almost as promptly as the shark himself, as a noiseless step stole up beside him through the darkness, and a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Take it easy, lad," was the answer, in the voice of the new engineer. "No need to rouse out the whole ship's company to let 'em know what a bright look-out you're keeping."

"Look-out, is it," grumbled Dan. "Let me tell you, sorr, 'tis a mighty foolish thrick a stalin' up in the dark, widout wid yer lave or by yer lave; and me on sintry and wid lashins of beautiful belayin'-pins all handy-like. 'Tis gettin' yer brains blown out ye'll be some fine mornin', and then ye'll be sorry for it."

The engineer chuckled.

"Can you spell 'knife'?" he asked, with a low laugh, as he drew from a side pocket something which in the uncertain light seemed to him to gleam in sinister fashion. In a moment one of the 'handy' belaying-pins had been snatched from its place, and a blow aimed at the suspected weapon. The engineer drew quickly back, just in time. "Hold hard, ye eternal idiot!" he whispered eagerly. "Creation and skittles, man! Don't ye know a rib-tickler from a rum bottle?"

Dan stood aghast.

"Begorra!" said he, scratching his shock head with the hand that still held the belaying-pin. "Good liquor's chape where you come from."

The engineer lowered the bottle after taking—or seeming to take—a long drink, and drew the back of his hand across his lips.

"Wal," he said reflectively, "that's as may be. A dollar a bottle, and rank Demerara at that."

Dan stole back the belaying-pin to its place, and grinned insinuatingly.

"Yer honour 'll be right, no doubt," he said, licking his lips suggestively. "Shure it isn't ayquil I'd be myself to giving an opinion—widout tasting av it."

There was no doubt at all events about the reality of the pull that honest Dan took, when once the bottle found its way into his horny fist, nor of the heartiness of his assurance that "though it has a bit of a twang in it, sure enough, bedad he's drunk worse, and hopes to again."

Nor was there any doubt, after the bottle had made two or three more journeys to Dan's mouth, that the liquor, good or bad, was safe beyond the reach of any belaying-pin. Then, as Pickering turned to go below again:

"What's that?" he whispered eagerly. "Yonder—in white—on the starboard side."

"'Tis the young misthress, divil a less. She do be standing there iver since I come on deck, poor thing, alookin' and alookin' at the bit of a light over on the shore yonder. Musha! 'tis the soft heart the wimin have!"

"Wal! I guess I'll not disturb her—ef it arn't by snoring. Good-night, Dan. I'll take a bit of a caulk till eight bells."

"Good-night, yer honour, and pleasant dhramas. Bedad! 'Tis sleepy I'm getting myself intirely."

So sleepy, indeed, that after a very few minutes of ineffectual struggle honest Dan fairly succumbed, and settled down in a heap upon the deck, with his head comfortably pillowed on an iron ringbolt. When Pickering stole on deck again ten minutes later, Dan was sleeping soundly. The engineer stooped and shook him by the shoulder, first gently, then sharply. A low grunt was the only answer, and with a satisfied chuckle he glided softly aft along the opposite side of the deck to that where Helen Sinclair still kept her loving watch, and disappeared in the darkness.

Another half-hour passed, and then Helen's reverie was broken by the sound of her own name, spoken softly in a well-known voice, and turning, she saw that Charlie Hamilton stood at her side.

They had not been alone together since that memorable day on the Biarritz sands. All through the short voyage from Bermuda she had studiously avoided all opportunities of private intercourse; and her intention had been so unmistakable, that Charlie had not ventured to avail himself even of those which, with all her care, the close companionship of shipboard could not but now and then throw in his way. Her manner, indeed, had not been unfriendly—poor Charlie would almost have preferred that it should have been,

for that would at least have afforded an opening for remonstrance. But it had been perfectly cool and queenly, with no more hint of the relations of two years ago, than if Biarritz itself had never been marked upon a map.

There was something decidedly cool now in the tone in which, after a moment's pause, during which Charlie could have sworn he saw her dash her hand hurriedly across her eyes, she turned slowly upon him with the encouraging remark:

"You are early on deck this morning, Major Hamilton."

The major winced, but his mind was made up. He would "have it out" before landing, at all events. And yet, somehow, it was terribly difficult work to begin.

"I don't think we have either of us slept much to-night, Miss Sinclair," he said at length; pausing as he did so in the hope of at least some sort of reply, that might, perhaps, give him something of a "lead" across this awfully stiff fence at which he found himself "craning" so unusually. But no response came, and the only thing was to ride straight and trust in Providence for what might be on the other side. So he went on, in commonplace phrase enough. "I can answer for myself, I know; and I don't think I have heard your step upon the cabin-stairs since you went on deck last night."

He meant that he had lain awake all night, thinking of and watching for her. And Helen knew what he meant as well as he; and flushed and frowned in the darkness, and gave a little tap with her foot upon the deck that was almost a stamp. But all she said, and in the quietest and driest of tones, was just—

"No?"

There was little enough sign of any lead here, and the major went on doggedly:

"And so at last I made up my mind—to—"

"To get up. Yes?"

"To see if you were really still on deck, and—"

"And remind me how imprudent I was. Thank you, Major Hamilton. It was really too thoughtful of you. I will go down at once. Good-night."

"Not just for one moment more, Miss Sinclair. I have been trying for an opportunity of speaking to you, of asking if"—"if I might hope to be forgiven," he was going to say, but at the last moment his courage failed. In his eagerness to detain her he had laid his hand

lightly upon her wrist, which had been drawn away, not hurriedly, but with a coldness and decision that seemed to freeze up the words on his very lips, and he ended lamely with—"if I might venture to call at Heathcliff. That is your father's place, is it not?" And then, in feeble apology, poor Charlie adds, blunderingly: "He was very kind to me last year, you know."

"Last year? Indeed?" was the reply. "Really, Major Hamilton, I need hardly tell you that Colonel Sinclair's—every Southern gentleman's house is always open. I fear, however, just now you may find but a poor welcome. This is hardly a time for visits of mere courtesy."

"Mine would not be a visit of mere courtesy, Miss Sinclair. I——"

"You are coming to join us—to fight for the Confederation?"

It was Hamilton's turn to colour now; and the almost insolent dryness of the speaker's tone did not by any means diminish that tendency.

"I did not quite mean that," he said, after a moment's pause. "I am hardly a free man, you know, in that way. But if you think——"

"I have no thought for anything now, Major Hamilton, but for my country and her trouble; and with that, of course, I cannot expect strangers to sympathise. Good-night."

And before poor Charlie Hamilton could get out more than a stammering word or two of eager protest against being counted among strangers, the girl had turned decisively away, and was gone.

The slender stately figure gleamed whitely through the darkness, and Charlie watched it with hungry eyes as it glided slowly along the deck, and began to disappear down the companion-ladder. Suddenly it stopped, turned, and with a low startled cry, sprang swiftly to the opposite bulwark to that against which the major was leaning.

"Hush!" she whispered, holding up a warning hand as he sprang towards her; but not for a moment relaxing her straining gaze into the night. "Listen!"

Hamilton listened almost as eagerly as herself. For some moments he heard nothing. Then through the heavy air came a faint, far-off "thud—thud—thud," that swelled for an instant, then sank, then died away again. So faint was it, that at first he was more than half inclined to think it must be mere fancy. But in

less than a minute it came again—rising, sinking, dying away once more into silence. And then both knew that the sound they heard was the lashing of some strange steamer's screw, as she lifted it for a moment half out of water under the influence of the long rolling swell.

"The Mohawk!" cried Helen, under her breath. And before her companion could reply she had vanished, and was already knocking eagerly at the captain's cabin-door.

It took but very few seconds to bring the old sailor on deck, and still fewer to satisfy his practised ear of the real nature of the ominous sound.

"Ay, ay," he muttered. "'Tis she, sure enough. But she's no seen us yet, and gin we but lie snug, its unco sma' chances she'll hae o' setting een upo us afore the morn. We'll hae to rin the chance o' a lang shot or twa, lassie; but gin ye'r een an ye'r mim'ry sairve ye but half as weel as ye'r lugs hae dune the night, we'll win through; never fear. But, body o' me! hoo comes it—— Look-out, there!"

But no look-out answered to the summons. Only the mate, sleeping dog-fashion, with both ears open, caught the muffled sounds of the captain's voice, and promptly joined the little group on deck. He too was soon satisfied as to the presence, not many miles off, of some strange steamer—and only one steamer was likely to be prowling along this unfrequented part of the coast.

Both captain and mate, however, were clear that, as yet, their actual position was undiscovered. "She's going dead slow, sir, and heading off-shore too," said the latter, carefully counting the distant beats, which indeed seemed now to come from yet farther away on their seaward bow. And as he spoke, both officers looked carefully round once more, to make quite sure that no betraying ray of light stole out incautiously from hatchway or skylight. All was safe there, however, and so long as the darkness lasted, it was scarcely possible that the position of the little Mocking Bird should be discovered.

"I'll just look up that lazy scoundrel of a look-out, captain," said the mate, "and give him something to keep his eyes skinned for the next hour or two, and then I think we shall be all right."

But he had not been gone many minutes on his search after the delinquent, before his voice was heard calling anxiously to the captain to come for'ard quickly. The look-out man was found, and sleeping soundly,

sure enough. But it was not any careless watchman's ordinary sleep. The emphatic kick with which his angry officer endeavoured to awaken him to a sense of his delinquency, instead of bringing him to his feet, produced only a grunt and a snore, nor could any amount of shaking or pommelling arouse him in the smallest degree from his lethargy.

"The man has been drugged," whispered Hamilton anxiously.

"Ay, that has he, lad," answered the captain, through his set teeth. "There's treachery amang us somewhere." Then with a bound he sprang from his kneeling attitude by the unconscious man's side, and laying one hand on Hamilton's shoulder, pointed eagerly with the other into the darkness, where, broad away upon the Mocking Bird's beam, a dull red glare showed up fitfully against the sky, and the one bright planet that has even now but just shown above the horizon, is blotted out by the thick rolling smoke.

"She's spotted us, sir," cried the mate, and even as he speaks came the distant "thud—thud—thud—thud," with a quickened beat that told its own tale. The mate needed no instructions. "Tumble up, there! tumble up!" he cried, in a loud hoarse whisper, that seemed to penetrate every cranny and corner of the little vessel, and soon brought her crew upon the deck. "See all clear with the cable there. Stand by to connect the screw. Mr. Pickering! Where the devil is that engineer? Rouse him out, some of you. Shall we slip and run for it, sir, or try our chance over the bar?"

There was a moment's pause. Even now Captain McDonald could hardly believe that their position had really been discovered, and hesitated before giving any order that might perhaps unnecessarily betray their whereabouts. And even as he hesitated, came news which, while removing all doubt as to the question of their discovery, told him that all power of decision is out of his hands.

"Sir! sir!" came a startled voice from the engineer's cabin, to which one of the ship's boys had been despatched to arouse the supposed sluggard. "Muster Pickering's not here, and——"

The rest of the sentence was lost in the hurried rush below, and, once there, the whole mystery was revealed with sufficient clearness. The traitor had fled, indeed; and the quick intuition of the old skipper—only too promptly confirmed by the report

of the seaman despatched in search of the boat that had been left floating astern, in readiness, if required, for reconnoitring purposes in the morning—speedily solved the, at first sight, difficult problem of his escape. But his own desertion, and the drugging of the sentry, had not been the only tricks he had played them. His cabin was empty; but there, lashed securely in the very scuttle, hung a large bull's-eye lantern—carefully shielded to throw no gleam of light either upwards, so as to catch the eye of anyone leaning over the bulwark, or downwards, so as to run any risk of reflection from the surface of the water; but throwing to seaward a straight steady ray, towards which the Yankee cruiser was even now steering at full speed.

"The soon'rill!" muttered the skipper between his teeth, as, with one mighty wrench, Hamilton tore the treacherous signal from its fastenings, and dashed it into a dozen fragments on the deck. "It's a' ower wi' us, lassie, I fear."

"Not yet, captain," said Helen firmly. "We can, at least, try the bar."

The old seaman shook his head.

"We hae gien the wolf the wedders to keep," he answered; "and we'll no find muckle 'oo for t' shearin'. Hoo is't wi' t' engines, McFarlane? Eh, laddie! I e'en thocht sae," he continued, as the second engineer held out to him, with a silence more significant than words, what seemed a handful of broken and twisted nuts and screws. "We're clean cripplet, Miss Helen. And whether yon chap wait till the morn's light, or comes alongside, as he maist probably will, in a quarter o' an hoor's time, matters unco' little noo."

Helen's eyes flashed.

"Then I will go myself," she said. "You will not refuse me a boat now, Captain McDonald?"

"Na, na, Miss Helen. The men's lives are their ain, and gin any o' them chuse to volunteer, I'll no gainsay them. But 'tis a desperate venture, and there's mair 'an me 'ill be sair tholed to lose ye, my bairn. Dinna forget that."

The girl turned to him with a softened expression, and, taking the old seaman's hand in hers, pressed it heartily.

"I am fearing to lose them," she said simply. Then raising her voice: "Which of you men will volunteer to row me ashore? I will give fifty pounds—a hundred——"

But no immediate reply came. Crossing a dangerous and unknown bar, on a pitch-

dark night, in an open boat, and a heavy swell, was a prospect that offered very moderate temptation, even to the most adventurous. The pause of hesitation had lasted long enough to bring the indignant flush to Helen Sinclair's cheek, but not to afford time for any further offer, when a voice, at the girl's elbow, answered quietly:

"I'm not much of a seaman, Miss Sinclair, but I can pull a pretty fair oar. I am at your service, for want of a better."

"Are you quite sure that you are free for such a service, Major Hamilton?" was the not very grateful reply.

"Quite," he answered, with a low laugh. "There is nothing in her Majesty's commission against my getting drowned in any way I please."

Helen frowned, and bit her lip. Poor Charlie's light tone jarred upon her high-strung nerves; and assuredly there was not a man in the ship whose assistance she would not gladly at that moment have accepted in preference to his. If there was one thing in the world to which she had more fully made up her mind than any other, it was that never, at any time or under any circumstances, would she forgive this presumptuous Englishman. And now she was asked to accept at his hands the very greatest service a man could render. And then, perhaps—But no; that was folly. There was little real danger to a man who could swim, and who was daring and cool. And the English major was cool enough, at all events, and—and daring enough too.

It was her only chance. They were alone now. The sailors had gone forward. The captain had turned away to give whispered orders for the lowering of a boat. She must accept this offer, palatable or unpalatable, or give up all hope of helping those dear ones who were even now almost within reach of her hand. And then, "thud, thud, thud," came the sound of the approaching screw; slower now again, since she had lost her guiding light, but terribly nearer even during those very few minutes that had elapsed since they had first been heard. She swallowed her pride with a great gulp.

"Come!" she said abruptly, and almost brusquely. "We have no time to lose."

"I am ready," was the simple reply; and, following her down the companion, Hamilton hastily seized a sheet of paper, dashed off half-a-dozen lines, and had

just handed the envelope, with a few whispered words of direction, to the captain, who had come below to announce that the boat was in readiness, when Helen entered once more.

Charlie Hamilton started slightly, and the white cap-mark on his forehead—which was the only part where the thick bronze would allow of any change of tint—flushed as hotly as the girl's own cheeks, as she stood for a moment, returning his gaze with a flash of something very like defiance. The long white robe, in which she had looked so spirit-like on deck but a minute since, had been laid aside. The shining hair was knotted up in a tight coil; the rounded arms bare to the shoulder; the tall lithe figure set off to the utmost by the jaunty little serge jacket and knickerbockers. It was the identical swimming-dress which had been the original occasion of their quarrel.

The pause was but momentary; certainly not long enough on Charlie's part to justify the sharp question:

"Have you repented of your offer, Major Hamilton?"

"Not in the least, Miss Sinclair. On the contrary, I am glad to see——"

She cut him short with a frown. Poor Charlie! He had better have held his tongue. Helen felt that at that moment she would have given half her fortune to be able to annihilate on the spot this saucy Englishman, who thus presumed, not only to blame, but even to excuse her. She had to grip fast hold of the packet of dearly-purchased medicine, slung in its waterproof wrapping round her neck, to keep herself from repudiating any service on his part then and there.

"God be wi' ye," whispered the old skipper, as they passed over the side. "Dinna pu' ower hard, major. There's an unco' glint i' the water the nicht, and thae Yankee scoonrills hae gude een. Ance ye're ayont the shelter o' the ship, ye maun just let her drift till we're awa'."

The advice was too evidently sound to be rejected, even by Helen's impatience. Charlie gave a few score of vigorous strokes, driving the heavy boat swiftly shorewards, and leaving a glittering trail, which sufficiently enforced the old seaman's caution. Then slackening speed, he contented himself with just dipping his oars carefully into the water with a long slow stroke, that did little more than keep her head in the direction whence came the distant thunder of the bar.

And so they drifted for what, to Helen's excited imagination, seemed hours. Neither spoke. It was not likely that Helen should be the first to break the silence, and though, half an hour ago, Charlie Hamilton would have given the price of his commission for such an opportunity, there was a consciousness in his mind now, that seemed to make speech ungenerous.

It was a relief when the distant exchange of hails, and the sudden roar of escaping steam, as the Mohawk's engines were brought to a stand, showed that the Yankee cruiser had fairly pounced upon her prey. Helen's heart beat fast. So fast that for the moment it lost all memory of its quarrel, and turned instinctively to seek the once familiar sympathy. The night had brightened somewhat, and in the clear light of the tropical stars the bronzed features that had once been the girl's ideal of all that was strong, and true, and trustworthy in man, stood out almost as plainly as at noonday. For the first time since that unfortunate hour, their eyes met without any interposing veil of anger or reserve.

There was a look in his that, even in the full tumult of excitement and anticipation, struck her with a sense of uneasiness, almost of awe. It was not the anxious deprecating look she had seen so often of late, only nursing her resentment the more assiduously each time she saw it. Still less had it anything of the satisfaction, or even triumph, that might perhaps have been expected in the face of the obligations under which she had perforce allowed herself to be placed. Only a wistful yearning look, that even in its tenderness seemed to have something of the solemnity of a long farewell.

"We are friends?" he said quietly, holding out his hand. What could she do but place hers in it? And the strong brown fingers closed upon it, with the gentle firmness that had so often sent a thrill through her slender white ones in those pleasant days.

Yet still that strange look did not leave his eyes, and even as she withdrew her hand again, half angry with herself for the momentary concession, all unavoidable as under the circumstances it surely was, something of an answering feeling seemed to rise in her heart. Not exactly pain, certainly not pleasure; more like the shooting of a sudden anxious fear.

Surely the man was not afraid? No. The full calm pulse was beating too steadily

for any thought of that. And yet—Another moment, and she would have spoken; but even as she opened her lips, came the muffled sound of a sudden movement on board the Mocking Bird, and then, across the half-mile or so of slowly heaving water which separated them, came the clear tones of the skipper's voice:

"Boat there! Pu' awa', man! Pu' for ye'r life!"

The major's oars were already in the water, and the little craft shot forward at a pace which promised at least to give the pursuers some trouble if they were to overtake her before reaching the bar, now less than two miles distant.

"Look to your steering, Miss Sinclair," he said quietly, as the girl involuntarily turned her head in the direction of the enemy; "we can't afford to give them an inch."

Helen bit her lip, vexed at having given way to a momentary weakness. For a few moments they sped on silently. Then suddenly came a flash, followed by a rattle, a boom, a curious hurtling in the air all around her; and before she had time to realise what had happened, a strong arm had plucked her from her seat, and laid her gently but swiftly in the bottom of the boat. Another rattling volley, another boom—boom—from the Mohawk's heavy guns, and again the curious hurtling filled the air, and the phosphorescent water flashed as the bullets dashed it over them. Then silence once more. The boat was at a stand now, and the treacherous glitter of oar and keel no longer betrayed her whereabouts.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, in a quick hoarse whisper, very unlike his usual calm tones, as he raised her to her seat again.

"Not a scratch," she answered laughing, half gaily, half nervously; for it was her first experience under fire, and she had a curious shaken feeling not quite describable. "And you?"

"We are," he replied gravely, and pointed to the bottom of the boat; where the water was already beginning to rise visibly above the flooring-boards. The boat was old and not over strong. Perhaps it had been only a bullet that had struck her; but it had struck in a tender place, and she was leaking rapidly.

Helen laughed again.

"Then we must swim for it," she said, gaily. "Come, major." And as she spoke she slipped off her shoes, and stood up for the plunge, her bare feet shining whitely

through the fast deepening water in the bottom of the boat.

The major rose too; but to her astonishment instead of himself preparing for the swim he held out his hand to her with a quiet, "Heaven speed you, Miss Sinclair. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" she echoed, wonderingly. And then her heart seemed to stand still, and a strange sick feeling swept over her as she asked with whitening lips: "What do you mean?"

"I can't swim," he answered simply. Then, as in the starlight he saw the delicate lips tremble, and the tears brim up into the great eyes: "It does not matter. Their boat will be up in ten minutes, and this will keep afloat till then."

He tried to laugh it off, drawing her attention to the distant sound of the approaching oars, which gave plain warning that no time was to be lost. She only set the trembling lips more firmly together as the big tears came rolling slowly down. Then, with a low cry, she flung her arms about his neck.

"Charlie! Charlie! forgive me! kiss me. Oh, if ever——"

A great sob choked her, and she buried her face on his shoulder. For one moment she lay in his arms as he strained her yielding form to his heart; then, with one more long clinging embrace, she glided gently from his clasp, and was gone.

"Wal, Mr. Philp, have you got the gal?"

The Mohawk had followed cautiously, but pretty closely upon her boat, sounding as she went. It was within a very short time of their parting when Charlie Hamilton found himself standing on the Yankee's deck.

"I've got him, cap'n," answered the lieutenant; "the girl had gone under."

"Gone under!" screamed his superior, with a volley of furious oaths. "Didn't I tell you she could swim like a tarntion alligator?" Then, snatching up his night glasses, "Ay, by ——," he cries, "and there she goes. Fire on her, marines! Ready with that gun there!" Then, before his eager orders could be obeyed, before even the indignant remonstrance could pass Charlie Hamilton's lips: "Hold hard!" he shouted again, "not a shot, any one of ye!"

"I am glad you have thought better of it, Captain Sherley," said the English major, in a tone which pretty plainly spoke his disgust.

The Yankee pointed to a bright gleam in the water scarce a hundred fathoms from their bow, shooting swiftly shoreward, straight for the little glimmer of phosphorescence that, as it rose on each succeeding wave, just showed where the girl was pressing gallantly on towards the bar.

"Wal!" he answered with a chuckle, "I don't care to waste my powder. And they're skeery critturs, is sharks."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before, with a crashing blow, Charlie had levelled him with the deck. Another moment and he had sprung upon a marine, wrested his firelock from him, and fired one desperate shot in the direction of the shark. But even as he drew the trigger a dozen hands were on him, and in a very few minutes more he was lying heavily ironed on the lower deck.

Meanwhile Helen had pressed on steadily towards the shore. Those were anxious moments, during which the sound of the Yankee oars drew nearer and nearer, and she dared only swim below the surface, coming up every now and then to rest and breathe. But presently came the sound of voices—of one voice especially, which sent the girl's blood coursing through her veins with a warmer glow than it had gained from the familiar exercise. He was safe, at all events. And then the oars turned seaward again, and she struck out gaily for the bar. Presently, as she rose on the top of one of the great rolling waves, she could see lights twinkling upon the shore, showing that the recent firing had aroused the inhabitants. Each moment the roar of the surf seemed to grow louder. In another hour she would be there, her mission accomplished, her dear father saved. Then suddenly came the sound of that single rifle-shot from the Mohawk, and she dived swiftly expecting a volley. When she came again to the surface she was in the trough between two of the great rollers; but, as she rose to the crest of the succeeding wave she turned to look if there were any signs of pursuit—and saw her doom.

The girl's heart stood still. She was no stranger to those tropic seas, and knew in a moment the meaning of that glancing streak of light shooting so swiftly in her rear. All was lost now. Not merely her own life, though it was hard to part with that now, just when it had become so much more dear, but all the fruits of her gallant

struggle, the succour she was bringing the lives of father, brothers—all. As for escaping by any exertions of her own, she knew the monster's speed too well to dream of that. Already to her excited imagination the hideous jaws seemed closing upon her, and with a loud cry she struck out wildly, lashing the sparkling water with hands and feet in the desperate hope of even yet scaring him from his prey.

Boom! the loud report of a cannon-shot came pealing across the water, not from the Mohawk this time, but from the shore, and the great shell flew screaming over her, and splashed heavily into the lifting swell behind her. When the advancing wave lifted her in her turn, the menacing streak of light was no longer to be seen.

The girl's heart gave a bound, then stood still again, as the horrible dread came back with tenfold force.

The monster had not been struck by that fortunate shot, or his dying "flurry" would have lashed the water into flame for yards around. He was only frightened for the moment by the heavy plunge so near him, and would soon return to the chase. Perhaps he was even now close upon her in some other quarter. Perhaps he was at this moment actually beneath her, turning his huge jaws upward to seize his prey. The whole sea seemed to become full of sharks. It was only by a strong mental effort that she could compel herself to continue swimming, so paralysing was the nervous terror that each movement might bring hand or foot into contact with the dreaded form.

Was it for minutes, or hours, or years, that she struggled madly on, not knowing, in what direction she was swimming; conscious of nothing but her own maddening fears? When at last the swift tropic dawn came upon her, and the great sun leaped with a bound from the sparkling waves, it seemed to Helen as though the time had never been in which she had done ought but battle wildly against a hideous death.

And then, just as, after the momentary ray of comfort brought by the returning sunlight, the nervous terror came rushing back more vividly than before at the thought that now even the brief warning of coming danger afforded by the phosphorescence of the water was taken away, came a sight at which every pulse began to throb with a wild revulsion of excitement.

Had terror driven her mad, or was that

indeed her own dear old yacht, her, graceful Ariel, already far across the bar, as if on its way to meet her? Strangely transmogrified truly, with all the delicate lines of her hull blurred and marred by great loops of heavy chain and huge clumsy masses of iron, but still with something of the old beauty, something she could not fail to recognise, unless, indeed, the whole vessel were but the creation of her fevered fancy.

She flung herself half out of the water, with a wild cry.

"Father! Father!"

And then she knew no more till the roaring of the great guns aroused her from her swoon in the cot of her own dear cabin.

It was not for some days after that she learned how it came to pass that, instead of putting back at once with her precious freight, the extemporised little ironclad stood on so boldly in chase of Uncle Sam's cruiser Mohawk; how she had clung about her father's neck, and told in incoherent words how "He" was there—a prisoner—and vowed if they put back on her account she would fling herself again into the water; refusing to be pacified till she had not only wrung from him a reluctant promise, but heard the order actually given, and then slipping quietly from his arms in a dead faint. And it was upon Charlie's shoulder that she hid her face as she laughingly protested that she didn't believe a word of it, and that if it were so, there was no very great heroism in the chase, for the poor crippled Mohawk had never had a chance even of getting in a shot.

Sixteen years have passed since then, but she and Colonel Hamilton have had no fresh quarrel—not even over the delicate question whether Baby Helen should learn to swim.

PROCTOR'S CASE.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

CHAPTER I.

TALK of the romance of love, indeed! There is twice as much romance in money, to my mind; even money by itself, to say nothing of it in combination with love. Am I serious? I never was more serious in my life; and as I've been for forty odd years clerk to Messrs. Nimmo, first father and son, and then son, successor to father, in this town of Ipswich, I'm likely to

know what seriousness means. Lawyers everywhere, and their clerks too, get a pretty correct view of human lives; but especially in quiet-going country towns, because you go on with people's history in places of this kind. You don't get it in fits and starts, seeing people in moments of difficulty and trouble, and all as they are with no make-believe about them, and then losing sight of them, never knowing what has come of them or their troubles, any more. You know all about them, their fathers and mothers before them, their wives with them, and their children after them; their small beginnings sometimes, and the bits of money they put by from time to time; how nobodies grow to be somebodies, and somebodies die out; how new places spring up, and old places change hands. It's all unstable, it's all dissolving views everywhere; but the sands are not quite so shifting, the canvas is not rolled off quite so quickly in country places as in your big city.

We knew a great deal about people's histories at Nimmo's, and most of the traditions of the respectable old firm were lodged in my head. How much surprised some of the people, whom I was in the habit of meeting every day for years, would have been, if they had been aware of all that I knew about them; and what a very little way their airs of consequence and their little fibs went with me. These airs and fibs are as plenty in country towns as in big cities, but they get found out more readily, because one has time to notice them. And I give you my word, going back to my point, that I have known no family secrets or troubles in which love played nearly so large or so romantic a part as money. Could I state a case off-hand? I could; there's the story of the Proctors—it's only one out of scores, but it comes the readiest.

When I first saw Bernard Proctor and his handsome young wife I was a youngster, newly promoted to a high stool in Mr. Nimmo's office. Very proud of myself I was in those days, and you could not easily have persuaded me that a greater man than Lawyer Nimmo was to be found nearer to the market-cross than Windsor Castle, or that King William himself would not have been the better of his advice. Bernard Proctor first came to consult Mr. Nimmo about a purchase, and his pretty wife came with him. Mr. Nimmo was busy in the back-parlour, and as his guest was Sir Henry Hartleup himself, he

could not even be told that Mr. Proctor was waiting, so that the new-comers had to sit down in the office; and so they did, very cosy, and very near one another on the horse-hair bench, and I had a good look at Mrs. Proctor while I pretended to be writing. She was as blithe and bonny as she could be, with blue eyes and a fine fresh complexion, and a happy look that did one good to see. Bernard Proctor was a good deal older than his wife, and had a hard look about him, as well he might have, for he had been money-gathering all his life, and I knew nothing, except money-spending in evil pleasure all his life, that hardens a man's face like that. Mr. Nimmo went to the door with Sir Henry Hartleup when his business was settled, and then he looked into the office. Mr. and Mrs. Proctor both stood up, and I, who, even then, knew all the tones in Mr. Nimmo's voice perfectly, was well aware when he spoke that these were not such clients as he put on his very best manners for.

"Come after that house, I suppose," said Mr. Nimmo, as he opened the door leading into his room, and Mrs. Proctor passed on. "Rather odd. Sir Henry Hartleup has just been here about it."

Then he shut the door behind him, and that was all I saw of the Proctors on that occasion; which I should not have remembered at all, had it not been associated with a rumour that reached us in the office that very day, that things were going very wrong at Hartleup. Things don't often go wrong with a fine old family estate without some member or other of the fine old family being to blame in the matter; and in this case the helping hand was lent by Sir Henry's only son, Mr. Frederick, who would have broken the Bank of England if he had had a chance, and lived long enough. As it was, he broke all he could, including his mother's heart; and we began to hear that Sir Henry was parting with property in every direction, that the fine timber in the park was being thinned at a great rate, and that the Hall would shortly be shut up. At our office we had reason to know that a portion of these rumours was true, for Sir Henry Hartleup owned several houses in the town of Ipswich, and in the outlying country immediately adjacent; and he employed Mr. Nimmo to sell them, first singly, then two or three at a time. Finally they were all sold, and the Hartleup proprietorship in everything outside the gates

of the Hall came to an end. A good deal of copying of the documents relative to those sales fell to my share, and thus I came to know that Bernard Proctor was buying most of the house property that Sir Henry Hartleap was selling, and in a quiet unpretending way he was taking root in the place. I never knew exactly what his origin was; and it does not matter. He had been a workman in some trade, his pretty wife had brought him a little money, and a lucky invention had procured him a share in a factory, in which he had done very well. Nobody knew how well, until long afterwards. He was the luckiest man in money-making I ever knew, and perhaps the most distrustful of all others who had made money. He and his wife occupied a substantial house about half-a-mile out of the town, and though the gentry did not recognise them, they were taken up by many of the leading townspeople, and they were bidding fair to be reckoned among those somebodies whom I have seen in the course of my life developed from nobodies. All this did not happen very quickly; it might have been five years or thereabouts from the time I first saw the Proctors until the manner of Mr. Nimmo had entirely changed towards his house-purchasing client. To do him justice, it never changed towards his house-selling one; he conducted Sir Henry Hartleap as deferentially to the street-door on the last day Sir Henry was ever seen at our office as on the first, and I never saw him look more sad than he looked when the broken and feeble gentleman rode away. Only a few weeks later, Sir Henry Hartleap was dead, and Sir Frederick had left the country. It will not take me long to tell the story of the next ten years. First, the Hall was let to a rich manufacturer, with the park and gardens, all complete, for two years; and then, when he and his family left the place, the house was shut up, the gardens were neglected, and the park was all let for grazing, up to the very windows. We did not hear much of Sir Frederick, and the little we did hear was no good. I had been for some time chief clerk at Mr. Nimmo's, when we received directions from Sir Frederick to have "a corner of the house" made ready for the reception of Lady Hartleap and her daughter. Nobody knew anything about them, beyond the facts that Sir Frederick had married a foreigner, and had only one child, a daughter—a circum-

stance which was generally regarded as serving him right, for Ipswich people did not like foreigners. The mother and daughter arrived, and were installed at the Hall, literally in a corner of the great house, with two servants, one a foreign woman, whom they had brought with them to wait upon them there. The mother was a tall, pale, black-eyed, slender, silent lady, who looked as if she and sorrow had long been so familiar that indifference had come of it; the daughter was a lovely child of six or seven, a fair little darling, who would, it was easy to see, grow up the image of Sir Frederick's mother. The two lived as quiet as mice in the great house, on a very small allowance, that was paid to Lady Hartleap through our office, and very often advanced, to my knowledge, out of Mr. Nimmo's own pocket, when the remittances were in arrear. All this time things were prospering with the Proctors, and the more the Hall dwindled and waned in importance, the more Mr. Proctor of The Mount, as he called his big house, which stood on ground as flat as a table, seemed to grow in substance and position. Mrs. Proctor was rather more than blithe and bonny by this time; she was downright fat, and had a double chin. Her two fine boys, Bernard and Richard, were the pride of her life, and I don't suppose she had a trouble in the world then, or for some years after, except it was that Bernard, as he grew out of childhood, bade fair to be remarkably like his father. An odd source of trouble to a loving wife! Yes, that seems true, but it is readily explained too. Proctor had made his money, and, in the beginning, at least, had worked very hard for it; it was no wonder he should love it, and keep a close grip on it, and have it constantly in his thoughts. But it was another thing that Bernard should love money as he did, from the time when his nature could be read with any certainty, with a thirst and a concentration that could not be hidden or ignored. The boys were sent to an excellent school, and well-taught in all the schooling which their father had not, and there the ruling passion of Bernard came out strongly. His father laughed at it when the boy was a child, and used to hoard his halfpence, and sell his tops and marbles; he rather admired it when the child became a boy, but his mother disliked and feared it. She had not found it impossible to love a money-loving man; but then her husband

did not love only money; whereas, it really seemed that her son had no power of loving anything else. We knew a good deal about the Proctors at our office; Mr. Nimmo—it was Nimmo successor before the two boys left school—did all Bernard Proctor's business for him. It was of a simple kind, because he stuck to house-property as his invariable investment, being an uneducated man, with a firm conviction that every speculation was a swindle, and a rooted distrust of securities, whether Government or otherwise.

By degrees the Hartletop and the Nimmo business came to be regarded as peculiarly my affair—I had always known more about them than Mr. Charles—and, in particular, I always called on Lady Hartletop to take her any papers which she had to see, and occasionally to make to her certain communications which Sir Frederick sent through our office. I have reason to believe that no direct correspondence ever took place between them from the date of Lady Hartletop's arrival at the Hall. I felt a great interest in Lady Hartletop, and was sorry that she persevered in the extreme seclusion which she had from the first adopted. Her manner to me was always gracious, ladylike, and reserved; she would hardly ever make a comment upon any communication which it was my duty to make to her, but, when she had received it, would put the matter aside, and converse with me for awhile, in her pretty foreign English. Miss Sybilla was generally present, and she would talk to me too, and sometimes question me about the little world outside the park-gates, of which she knew so little. I suppose Lady Hartletop's rigid avoidance of her neighbours of every degree came from her being too poor to associate with her equals on equal terms, and too proud to associate with her inferiors on any. She never omitted to inquire for my wife, but she had never seen her; and I do not know whether she knew even the names of the families who resided close to the park-gates. Miss Sybilla was educated entirely by her mother, and, as I afterwards came to know, very well educated. She was a cheerful, bright, pretty creature, and her young glad-heartedness seemed to be proof against the influences of solitude, and that very trying form of poverty, which combines external grandeur with the lack of all that makes life beautiful or pleasant.

Miss Sybilla and her foreign attendant

were frequently seen in the suburbs, and even in Ipswich itself, though Lady Hartletop never passed the park-gates.

"And a sweet pretty creature she is, Mr. Forrest," said Mrs. Proctor to me one day, when Sybilla Hartletop was, as near as I could judge, "sweet seventeen," and the very picture of health and sprightly English loveliness; "for all she never has a silk frock, and scarcely a new bonnet to speak of, and cooped up with a foreigner, too."

"The foreigner is her mother," I objected; "and Miss Hartletop has never had any other companions, so I suppose she does not miss them."

"Ah, yes, that's all very well; but it won't last. Take my word for it, Mr. Forrest, though I have no daughters myself, it won't last."

Mrs. Proctor was right. It did not last, and it came to an end very shortly after Mrs. Proctor had thus given her opinion.

A little before this time we had received at our office a communication from Sir Frederick Hartletop of an unusual character. This time he instructed us that, owing to the death of a relative, Lady Hartletop had become possessed of a legacy of one thousand pounds, and the papers concerning the bequest were forwarded to us. When I waited on her to convey this good news, she displayed, for the first time in my presence, signs of emotion, but she speedily put them down, and proceeded to ask me anxiously whether Sir Frederick had said anything about reducing her income in consequence of this bequest, or had dictated any special form of investment for it. I answered both questions in the negative, and she seemed much relieved. At the moment Sybilla came into the room, and her mother, with an unreserve quite new to me, told her what had happened.

"Oh mamma mia!" she exclaimed, with the eagerness of a child, "may I not have a pony now, a little cheap pony? You know you said I could, if only we had the least little money over and above."

The mother looked at the girl with the fondest smile, and said to me:

"I think, Mr. Forrest, we may risk the pony."

Miss Sybilla had her pony, and she used to ride sedately about the park and along the quietest of the roads close by. I remember her well, with her long skirt and her broad-leaved hat and feather; and I chanced to meet her one day when I was

going to the Hall, looking so bright and pretty that I had not the heart to tell her what my errand was, but let her go her pleasant way with only a word or two about the pony.

"You manage him nicely, Miss Sybilla. He is very quiet."

"Very; only when there's a sudden noise. He hates that."

I went on, thinking that Lady Hartletop would be sure to prefer being alone when she must hear my tidings. If they were not grievous to her, Sybilla had better not see that it was so; if they were grievous nobody could help her.

I had come to tell her that Sir Frederick Hartletop had died suddenly, and that, when the new baronet should have taken possession of the Hall, as we presumed he would immediately, she must provide herself with another dwelling, without any increase of her means. Beyond the capital of the small income which was secured to her, Sir Frederick Hartletop left nothing. A fine estate, an honourable name, the peace of many lives, the traditions of a long line of worthies, had all been sacrificed to his selfish vices.

I told Lady Hartletop the truth as gently and considerately as I could; and I knew that, notwithstanding the strong restraint she put upon herself, it was grievous to her, and she would be better alone for awhile. So I merely urged upon her that she must come to a speedy decision as to what she would do, rather as a means of occupying her, than because there was any real reason to fear her being incommoded, and was about to leave her when she said:

"Are you to continue to manage the business of the Hall?"

"We have no instructions as yet from Sir William Hartletop. He is, we understand, an elderly unmarried man; and the entail stops with him."

"Yes, I believe that is so. He could, therefore, sell the Hall, which Sir Frederick would gladly have done if he could."

"I should think he would do so; he has never seen the place; the—but what is this?" I rose and hurried to the window, with her back to which Lady Hartletop was sitting; I had caught sight of a man leading Miss Sybilla's pony, followed by another man carrying something in his arms. Lady Hartletop started up; I in vain tried to restrain her; she rushed towards the great empty echoing hall, the wide doors lay open, and in the act of carrying his burden up the steps was

Richard Proctor. In his arms lay Sybilla, insensible and with a broken arm.

"Don't be alarmed, madam," said Richard, "she has only fainted within the last minute or two, because it was impossible to carry her without hurting her arm. Let me lay her down, and then I will fetch a doctor at once."

When Sybilla had been laid down on a sofa, and her horrified mother was loosening her dress, I looked out for the other man, whom I had not recognised, and saw him walking off with his hands in his pockets, having tied the guilty pony to one of the pillars of the porch. The man was Bernard Proctor's eldest son.

CHAPTER II.

MISS SYBILLA HARTLETOP was not long laid up with her broken arm, but the accident was, nevertheless, productive of certain consequences; among which was the relaxation of Lady Hartletop's rigid rule of seclusion, in favour first of Richard Proctor and afterwards of his mother. Events followed each other at the Hall just then with rapidity, in proportion to the long stagnation that had existed there. Instructions were received at our office from Sir William Hartletop, to the effect that he wished the business of the estate to be conducted by Mr. Nimmo until such time as he could advantageously effect a sale of it, as he had no intention of residing upon it. But he made no allusion to the widow and daughter of his predecessor, and when I proposed to Lady Hartletop that we should apply to Sir William for permission for them to continue to reside at the Hall, as the place was not to be let, she refused to allow me to do so. A small house in the vicinity was taken for her, and on Miss Sybilla's recovery the flitting took place. The house belonged to Bernard Proctor, and was, indeed, the very one of which there had been a question so many years previously, on the first occasion of my seeing Mr. and Mrs. Proctor.

It would not have required the penetration of a sage, or the prophetic power of a magician, to foresee and foretell the effect, upon the persons chiefly concerned, of the occurrence that had introduced Richard Proctor and Sybilla Hartletop to each other. The terror of Lady Hartletop, and her helplessness in the presence of her child's injury and suffering, contrasted strangely with the stoical reserve of her usual demeanour so far

as I was acquainted with it. The readiness, the genuine kindness, the courteous helpfulness of the handsome young man who had, as she persisted in believing, saved Miss Sybilla's life—though the pony's misdemeanours had hardly involved so serious an issue as that—seemed to constitute a new revelation to the woman who had just received two such shocks as had come to Lady Hartletop within the same hour. Richard Proctor had always been a favourite of mine, and if I thought Lady Hartletop made a little too much of what he had done, I was careful to keep that opinion strictly to myself. It was two or three days after the accident that, on going to enquire for Miss Sybilla, I found Mrs. Proctor at the Hall, and heard that Richard had proposed to bring his mother there, on finding that nobody in the house knew anything about broken bones, and that Lady Hartletop's nerves were entirely unequal to the occasion. Mrs. Proctor was the motherliest of women, and the curiosity she had long felt about the recluse lady and her daughter gave way to genuine interest—not a little assisted by the fact, that she and her son formed the only exception to the rule which excluded visitors from the Hall. When the new arrangements had been made, I felt almost as if I had got the mother and daughter off my mind; and shortly afterwards my wife and I went away for a month, on one of the holiday trips which were of rare occurrence in our lives. The first piece of local intelligence I heard on my return was, that Mr. Proctor had had a severe illness, and was recovering from it but slowly. The second was that it was said that he intended to purchase Hartletop Hall. The latter item of news was not generally well received. There was a rather extensively-spread feeling that self-made men were all very well in their way, and of course it was very commendable to raise one's-self in the world, and to make as large a fortune as possible; but that sort of thing ought to stop short of buying up old places with which none but aristocratic traditions were associated—transactions of the kind savouring of bumpiousness and bad taste. As no intimation of any such intention on his part had reached our office, I did not pay much heed to the rumour.

"The young man has been here several times," Mr. Nimmo said to me, "and he seems very discontented and ill-conditioned.

Proctor has made a great mistake in letting those boys of his idle about."

"A very common mistake for men to make, who have worked hard in their own time. Of course you refer to young Bernard?"

"Yes—I know no harm of the other; unless philandering with Miss Hartletop is to be counted as harm, and I suppose his father doesn't think so, or he would have put a stop to it."

"Indeed," said I. "Has it come to that? I should have said Proctor would not have liked anything of the kind, and that Lady Hartletop would have liked it still less. Besides, Richard is not much more than a boy."

"I suspect you and I thought ourselves a good deal more than boys at his age. He's twenty-four, if I am not mistaken, and a right good fellow; not in the least like his brother. That is a young man I don't quite make out. He showed a good deal more curiosity about his father's business matters, while Proctor was ill, than I approved of. His affectionate anxiety to ascertain whether all his 'temporal affairs' were settled, so that he might not have any 'mental disquietude,' struck me unpleasantly; in fact, I believe him to have been simply fishing to find out whether his father had made a will. Of course I did not understand him. He was anxious to know when you would return; and no doubt he will ask you the question point-blank."

"If he does, I shall give him a very unpleasing answer."

The next day I happened to see both the brothers. I have not said much about them, and may as well sketch them here. Bernard was remarkably like his father in face; not ill-looking, but sullen in expression, and lacking the openness and gaiety that rendered his younger brother attractive. He had never taken to anything more arduous in the way of work, than was implied in his having joined a militia regiment; and he lived at home for the most part, and, as was pretty freely said of him, waiting for a dead man's shoes. Richard also lived at home, but he had early developed a taste for art, to the astonishment of his father, to whom all the arts were alike incomprehensible, and to the delight of his mother, who chiefly understood them as sure safe occupations, which need not necessarily part mothers from their sons. After a prolonged tour in Italy, he had returned to the old town,

which has always had a peculiar charm and inspiration for painters. Between the brothers there was but little intimacy, as there was no resemblance; each went his separate way.

The elder brother called at our office, and very soon let me see that Mr. Nimmo had been correct in his surmise.

"My father has had a bad illness," he said, "and I don't believe he is so much better as he and my mother think. By no means out of the wood yet; and of course it would be well that his affairs should be all in order."

"I never knew a time when your father's affairs were not in order," was my curt reply to this speech, and it disconcerted him for the moment. He rallied quickly, however, and asked me the point-blank question I expected.

"That is satisfactory," he said, "and no doubt it includes future arrangements. I conclude you have drawn up my father's will?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Bernard," I answered, "if I decline to inform you on that point. You are of course not aware of it, but it is the custom among lawyers never to answer questions of the kind."

"Indeed! I was not aware of it. Have you had a pleasant trip?" And the object of Mr. Bernard's call was not again referred to. We spoke of Richard, and the grudging nature of the elder brother came out strongly then.

"He is constantly at Lady Hartletop's," said Mr. Bernard, "making a fool of himself about the girl; as he has done ever since the day he picked her up, and I caught her pony; which, by-the-bye, was much the more difficult feat of the two. It's no business of mine, if they all think it all right, as I suppose they do, or Lady Hartletop would not have him there. Richard is the only man who visits at her house, and my father and mother are as much in love with Miss Hartletop, to all appearance, as he is. Everyone to his taste; it is a queer one, to my mind."

"Don't you admire the young lady?"

"No, not particularly. She's well enough, but she is a mere child, has no manners, and no money. Besides, the daughter of a disreputable bankrupt, though he was a baronet, and a foreign woman, whom nobody knows anything about, is not the sort of person I should have thought my father would have liked even his younger son to marry."

He gave me a quick but searching glance

here; I was, however, prepared for and I baffled it.

"I cannot defend Sir Frederick's memory, but Lady Hartletop is one of the most estimable women I ever knew, and I cannot agree with you on a single point, except that there's no money on the lady's side; and, do you know, I am rather surprised Lady Hartletop should like it—if it is really to be—because she was always so proud in all her poverty, and so exclusive; and you know it is your father's boast that he is a self-made man, and has no notion who his grandfather was."

"Yes, he talks like that, and I am very much of his way of thinking. Ancestry is rubbish, but respectability, just one generation back, is not. Richard has that advantage over Miss Hartletop at all events, though her ladyship would not see it in that light. You have hit her off pretty correctly, but not quite. If I, instead of Richard, had been in question, she would have been in a fine flutter on the problematical-grandfather head; but she believes in art, and its 'aristocracy,' and is quite satisfied, because Richard daubs canvas, and sees more than bricks and mortar in an old house, and more than so much timber in an old tree. It is to be hoped he will be able to make something of it by-and-by. It has only cost money up to the present; but, of course, my father grudges nothing to Richard."

"I should not have thought he grudged anything to you."

I could not help saying this; there was such ill-will in the young man's tone, and such greed in his cold eyes.

"I never said he did," was the sullen reply; "but there's a difference when one is an eldest son." Very little more was said, and after office hours I went to pay my respects to Lady Hartletop. At her house, I found Richard Proctor studying, in Miss Sybilla's company, the effects of the sunset. The young people looked very handsome and very happy, and Lady Hartletop seemed to have wakened up to a new interest in life. Richard Proctor and I always liked each other's society, though we were on different levels in life, and we walked away from the house together. He gave me some details of his father's illness, and added that he was very glad I had returned, as his father had repeatedly said he wanted to see me.

"I believe," said Richard smiling, "he thinks Mr. Charles, as he always calls him, knows nothing about business, and

that you are the real, original, and only genuine Nimmo."

"He is so accustomed to me," I replied, "he associates me with his business matters since long before they were the important affairs they are now. But, have you not a little business of your own to talk to me about? I think you have."

"Ah," said Richard, with a pleasant embarrassment, which became his handsome manly face right well, "someone has been talking to you already. There's nothing settled, you know, only we—we understand each other. It's wonderful, isn't it, that Lady Hartleup should be satisfied with a nobody like me, and that such a girl should like me?"

I did not think either circumstance very extraordinary, but it was pleasant to see the real humility of true love in the young man, and I did not contradict him. They had not said anything to his father, yet, it appeared, on account of his illness, but his mother knew all about it.

"And she, God bless her!" continued Richard, "has no doubt it will all come right, though he will not take it quite as she does. When he is all perfectly well again, she is going to speak to him herself."

The further plans of the joyful young lover were as vague as such plans usually are. They included nothing positive except perfect happiness, and the resolution to achieve an independence.

Among the business communications of the following morning, was a request from Mr. Proctor that I would call on him in the course of the day. I did so, and found him so much changed in appearance since I had last seen him, that I felt anything but certain that his convalescence was so far advanced as his family believed it to be. He was thin, shrunken, and many years older in appearance, and the hard concentration of his expression had given place to a peevish feebleness. He received me in the small room on the ground-floor of the spacious and handsome house, in which the Proctors had now resided for many years; a dingy, but comfortable apartment, which had been exempted from the "new-fangling" that he freely permitted in every other part of the house. Mr. Proctor occupied his invariable well-stuffed red-morocco-covered armchair, but he could no longer be said to fill it. He scanned my countenance with that curious and always ominous eagerness of a sick man, to detect the real impression

made by his appearance, and said, as he sank back in his chair with a sigh:

"You did not expect to find me so cut up, did you, Forrest?" Then he added testily:

"I did not send for you to waste your time in discussing my looks however; I'm glad to see you again. And now we'll get to business."

We did get to business, of the kind I had been accustomed to transact with him for years, but I felt all the time that this was not the real purpose for which he had summoned me—that there was more behind. When the ostensible matters were disposed of, I said something about leaving Mr. Proctor, but he begged me to remain, and then, with a manifest effort, said:

"I wanted to tell you that I had done, some time ago, what you advised, though I have never liked to talk about it. I made my will last winter."

"Indeed, I am glad to hear it. That is a precaution a wise man never neglects."

"I can't say I liked doing it. You may call it an ignorant prejudice if you like, but I can't get over it. However, it is done, and now I want you to look over it for me, and see that it is all right. I should have asked you to draw it up for me, only that I could not bear to talk about it, and so I drew it up myself."

He opened a drawer in the writing-table at his elbow—the key was attached to his watch-chain—and took out the document. Its contents were very brief, and it was duly attested. As I read the lines, which only covered one side of a sheet of foolscap, Mr. Proctor observed me with the closest attention; so much so as to deprive me to some extent of my usual self-possession. I could not help glancing off the paper and up at him; and in doing so I saw something which made me start. Mr. Proctor's armchair and writing-table were divided from the back of the room by a large screen; just beyond it, a few feet from the fireplace, there was a door, opening from a passage, by which the room could be approached from the basement storey; and on the opposite wall, exactly on a line with the doorway, hung an old-fashioned convex mirror. The top of the screen was about two inches less than the height of the door, which opened away from it, and was of solid mahogany, very close fitting and well hung. As my eyes were raised to Mr. Proctor's face, they caught sight of the faintest possible movement of this door, seen above the screen top, and, at the same moment, of the

diminutive reflection of a figure in the mirror on my right, which was out of Mr. Proctor's line of sight. The whole thing passed in an instant, so quickly that it might have been a fancy, but that, keeping my eyes fixed on the door, I observed a second slight movement as it noiselessly closed.

"If you will allow me, I'll just see that the door on that side is shut," I said, and going towards it very quickly, threw it open. The passage, which was a long one, and lighted by a large glass-door giving on a flower garden at the end, was empty, and the garden-door appeared to be shut. A little sprig of stephanotis, lying on the crimson cloth covering of the passage, half-way down, was the only object to be seen. I returned to my place, and resumed the perusal of Mr. Proctor's will.

"Is it, or is it not all right?" he asked impatiently.

"It is in perfectly legal form," I answered slowly, "nothing could be more clear or explicit; but, I confess its provisions surprise me. I should have thought you would have been sure to make an eldest son, as it is called, of Mr. Bernard. But that is no business of mine. This"—I handed it to him as I spoke—"is a perfectly valid will."

"Had I not better let you have a copy of it?"

"Just as you like. There is no occasion, but it is easily done. Shall I take it with me?"

The document was in his hand, and he had half extended it towards me, when he drew it back, and replaced it in the drawer.

"No," he said, "not now. I will think over it, and take it to you to-morrow or next day. I'm going out if it's fine; I am tired of being cooped up here."

Then, seeing that I intended to go away without any further comment, he added uneasily:

"You do not approve of what I have done. There's no injustice, however; a man has a right to do as he likes with his own."

"Within bounds, yes. It is not so much that I don't approve, as that I don't understand the motive of your will. However, as I said before, that is not my business."

"Come, come, Forrest, you and I have been friends for too many years for you to come the mere lawyer over me now. I will tell you why I have made a will so

unlike what you expected. It is because I have found out, too late, that there are better things in the world than money, and that there is nothing worse than the inordinate love of it, such love of it as Bernard's for instance, that makes him grudge me the few years I have to live, and hate his brother because he is to have a share of the money I made by industry, which he is incapable of. A share! yes, such a share as Bernard little thinks of shall Richard have, my fine-hearted boy! I've worked hard in my time for what my son grudges me now; and if it could not buy me rank and position, that did not matter to me; I did not want them. At all events, I am not bound as men are who have those things, and I can do, as I said before, as I like with my own."

His face was quite strange to me while he spoke thus; the passion in him routed the commonplace, even in his appearance.

"Have you considered that this disposition of your property will put ill-will between your sons?"

"Not more than exists already—that is to say, on Bernard's side; there's none on Richard's, and never will be. I know the boy well. I have been studying him closely when he knew nothing about it, and I can trust him. His brother grudges him all I give him already. Am I to make no difference between the son who is the pride of my life, and the son who is its great disappointment?"

This was a strong argument, and I had none ready to oppose to it, even if I had felt more strongly than I did on the subject. I saw that Mr. Proctor was growing excited, and I took leave of him. In the hall I met Mrs. Proctor and her son Richard; and while I was saying a few words to them, Bernard came in by the front entrance, the door being open.

"Here are the flowers you wanted," he said, addressing his mother; "the conservatory is almost bare;" and he handed to Mrs. Proctor a bouquet, in which some sprigs of stephanotis were conspicuous. Bernard hardly noticed my presence, but turned abruptly into the dining-room, and presently Mrs. Proctor and Richard drove away in a little pony-carriage, and I also left the house. I was very busy for two or three days after this, and I hardly thought of Mr. Proctor and his will; but in a subsequent leisure moment I recurred to it, and was disposed to believe that, as I had heard no more of the document, he had changed his mind. Its provisions

were very simple; they merely constituted Richard Proctor the sole heir to all the property of every kind, of which the testator should be in possession at the time of his death, and charged him with the payment to his brother of an annuity of four hundred pounds. A similar sum had been previously secured to Mrs. Proctor by settlement; and beyond a strong, but, as the testator expressed it, "unnecessary" recommendation of her to the care of her son Richard, there was no mention of her. The testator added that in case an opportunity for the purchase of Hartleap Hall should arise, he wished his son Richard to buy the place. There was not a word of explanation. The man, though strangely ignorant in many ways, was shrewd, and he wrote nothing that could lead to his will being impugned as a malicious act.

"Forrest," said Mr. Nimmo, as he entered my room, with precipitation very unusual to him, "here's bad news from the Proctors. Mr. Proctor has had a stroke of apoplexy, and is dying."

He died that same afternoon, without having recovered consciousness. The first intimation I received of the event, in my business capacity, was a formal letter from Bernard Proctor, in which he inquired whether our office was in possession of any will or other document, which it would be necessary to consult in reference to the arrangements for the funeral. To this we replied that no such document was in our custody. I, of course, knew that the will which I had read did not contain any instructions of the kind. I heard that Mrs. Proctor was in great grief, and that Lady Hartleap and her daughter remained almost entirely with her. Knowing what good news there was in store for pretty Miss Sybilla and her lover, and also for her mother, I was glad to know that they were all meriting it by their sympathy with the poor widow, and their gentle tendance of her. Next came an invitation to Mr. Proctor's funeral, and an intimation that my presence, and that of Mr. Nimmo, were requested after the interment, for the purpose of arranging pressing business connected with the late event. During the week I did not see either of the young men, but I caught sight of Miss Sybilla Hartleap, looking properly serious, although very pretty, as she was executing some commissions in the town.

The appointed day arrived, and the funeral took place. Without being a

popular man, Mr. Proctor had gained the respect of the community, and his funeral was largely attended. I saw Bernard Proctor for the first time since his father's death, standing beside the grave; and he saw me. I traced in his aspect something which was not sorrow, nor the affectation of sorrow, but an intense pre-occupation. At the conclusion of the funeral service he stood quite still, apparently unconscious that it had terminated, until his brother touched him on the arm, when he started and walked away without looking at Richard.

Two hours later, Mr. Nimmo and I were ushered into the room in which I had last seen Mr. Proctor. It had the painfully orderly look with which we are all acquainted on similar occasions; the screen was folded and placed in a corner, the arm-chair and writing-table were in their accustomed places, but there were no papers, books, or signs of the ordinary occupations of life in the place that should know its former owner no more. The early autumnal afternoon was chilly, a fire burned in the grate; the servant set chairs for us near to the fireplace and withdrew. After a few moments, Bernard Proctor entered the room by the second door, which I have before described as opposite to the convex mirror upon the wall, and almost simultaneously Richard came in by the other. After a few words of course, Bernard Proctor seated himself in his father's armchair, in exactly the same place that Mr. Proctor had occupied during my last interview with him, and Richard stood by the fire with his hand on the back of my chair.

"We have sent for you, gentlemen," said Bernard Proctor, abruptly, and not directing his glance towards either of us, "to inform you that, unless there be some mistake, and a will exists among the papers of our late father which are in your keeping, he has died intestate. There is no will here."

"No, indeed," said Richard; "every part of the house has been searched, and there is not anything of the kind. My mother, too, is confident that my poor father never made a will."

Though he was careful not to look near me, I detected an irrepressible gleam of triumph in the face of Bernard Proctor.

"As we know nothing about law," Richard went on, "and my father, as you know, Mr. Forrest"—he touched me lightly on the shoulder—"kept all his business

matters strictly between himself and yourself, and not even my mother knows anything about them, we thought it better to have this matter cleared up at once."

"Is it perfectly certain that there is no will among the papers in your keeping?"

It was Bernard who asked the question, and he addressed it to Mr. Nimmo, who, evidently annoyed by his tone, replied shortly:

"It is quite certain, sir."

"No will can be found in this house. It is therefore plain that my father never made one; and my brother and I wish to ascertain the exact legal position in which we stand. My mother is provided for by settlement."

A certain pomposity came into his manner towards the close of this speech, which increased my distaste towards the young man.

"I beg your pardon," I said, forestalling Mr. Nimmo, who was about to speak, "but you go too fast. Mr. Proctor did make a will, and I am acquainted with its contents; for I read the document in this room, at his request, ten days ago. It was duly signed and attested by two witnesses, who are no doubt forthcoming, and was dated less than a year ago."

I looked straight at Bernard Proctor while I spoke those words, and saw him turn pale in spite of a strong effort.

"Indeed!" he said quickly, "a very strange statement, Mr. Forrest; but if you really saw the will, there's nothing for it but to accept the fact, and to conclude that my father afterwards destroyed it."

"Who were the witnesses?" The question was Richard's.

"John Jenkins and Bartholomew Jenkins."

"The gardener and his son, who went to America in the spring!" exclaimed Richard; "great favourites with my poor father they were. The very two he would have selected if he did not want a thing talked about."

"He had an objection to making a will," said I, "and it cost him a great effort. If he destroyed the one which I read, some very powerful motive, produced by some extraordinary circumstance, must have induced him to do so. May I ask whether anything unusual occurred just before his seizure—within the three preceding days, I mean?"

"Nothing at all," answered Richard, "on the contrary, he seemed more cheerful than usual."

"Excuse me, if I ask a question which does not seem to be justified; but this is a serious matter. Was any communication made to him which could have changed his feelings towards you, or even made him feel temporary annoyance?"

"I know what you mean," Richard answered promptly, with his usual frankness; "and you are quite right to ask the question. We had said nothing to him respecting my hope of becoming Miss Hartletop's husband, but my mother, finding him so well and so cheerful, had made up her mind to speak to him about it on the very day of his seizure."

"Then it is very difficult to conceive what can have induced him to destroy his will. He had made it, to my knowledge, after long and mature deliberation, and was even unwilling to re-peruse it, when I suggested that he should do so before sending it to our office to be copied. However, I suppose it must be accepted, Mr. Bernard, as you say so, that the will has been destroyed."

Again I spoke very slowly, and looked full at him.

"It must be accepted that a will was in existence," he replied, with unbridled insolence, "as you say so, Mr. Forrest."

"Precisely so; but I think I can jog your memory sufficiently to induce it to recall something corroborative of my distinct recollection in this matter."

"My memory—I don't know what you mean. I know nothing about it."

"Oh yes, I think you do—I think you do. I was reading your father's will, he sat opposite to me, where you are sitting now, and in the same chair, when you opened that door yonder—it's capitally hung, and it makes no noise—and pushed it just sufficiently open to hear our voices, and to see, in the mirror there"—I pointed to it—"what we were doing. I could see your face for a moment before you withdrew, very discreetly, not to disturb a business interview in which you had not been asked to take part." He was more than pale now; he was livid, and he gripped the arms of his chair with savage force. But he did not speak; I think he could not.

"I looked after you, but you had withdrawn so quickly in your great discretion, that you were out of sight; there was no trace of you but this sprig of stephanotis lying on the carpet. I idly picked it up and put it in my pocket-book, as a little bit of circumstantial—shall I say evidence,

or detail? Your brother will probably remember that, when I joined him and your mother in the hall, you were just coming in with a nosegay from the hot-house, chiefly of stephanotis."

"In heaven's name, what does all this mean?" asked Richard, looking from me to his brother in amazement.

"Mean, my dear Mr. Richard! It merely means that Mr. Bernard had forgotten the little incident, which might have cleared up all doubt in his mind as to the existence of a will, but which, of course, does not aid us in the least in arriving at a conclusion as to what has become of the document."

Richard made no reply; he turned his back on his brother, laid his arm on the chimney-piece, leaned his head on his hand, and kept silence during the remainder of the scene.

Bernard Proctor literally gasped with rage, as I turned the withered twig about in my fingers, and affected to look closely at it. Mr. Nimmo looked at us both in bewilderment.

"Go on, sir, go on!" Bernard stammered; "I don't know what you are driving at, but go on. If you know so much about this will, you know what it contained."

"Perfectly," I replied, "but it is no part of my duty to tell what I know on that point. The knowledge was imparted to me in confidence; the document has been destroyed, presumably by the framer of it. His desires and intentions can therefore no longer be in question, the communication of them to me remains a confidential one, and I shall certainly not violate that trust."

"Enough of this, sir," said Bernard, violently; he had rallied from his brief panic. "We do not require to know any of your scruples, we demand from Mr. Nimmo his professional opinion upon our legal position under the circumstances of my father's having died intestate."

"I am very sorry, gentlemen," said Mr. Nimmo, with firmness, "to be present on so painful an occasion. I should prefer to have a little time to think over the matter; I could not answer such a question offhand."

He rose while speaking, with an air of decided leave-taking. Still, Richard Proctor did not turn his head or make a sign.

"It ought not to be so difficult for an experienced lawyer," said Bernard, "and

it is very unpleasant for us that there should be any delay."

"There need not be a moment's," said I, "if Mr. Nimmo will permit me to answer your question for him." Mr. Nimmo made a gesture of assent; Bernard Proctor rose, and took one step nearer to me; only Richard made no sign.

"Your position is a very painful and unfortunate one, Mr. Bernard Proctor," I continued, "you are absolutely dependent on your brother, being entitled to no share whatever in your father's property, he having died intestate."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Bernard, with an oath. Richard raised his head and listened, still standing with his back to us.

"Precisely what I say. Your father's will made such a division of his property as he thought right; that will has been destroyed; and, as he never would invest his money in securities, it is all in what is technically termed real property. He was not aware, and doubtless you are not aware, that the custom of borough-English prevails in Ipswich, as it does in many other towns in England. The meaning of that custom is that, on the death of an intestate, the real property goes to the youngest son. You are much to be pitied, Mr. Bernard Proctor; it is very unfortunate that your father's will was destroyed."

"It's false!" he gasped, almost inarticulate with rage; "it's false! There's no such infamous law, or if there is I'll fight it in every court in the kingdom! It's a vile plot between you and my brother; you were always confederates."

For all reply I made him a bow, and accompanied it by a slow and deliberate shrug of my shoulders. My feeling at the moment was, that anything which might befall him would be a great deal too good for Bernard Proctor.

"Now, Mr. Nimmo, I am at your service."

So saying, and without any reference to Richard, I was about to follow Mr. Nimmo, who had gained the door by which we had entered, when Bernard Proctor, pushing away the armchair so that it spun round upon its castors, rushed out of the room by the other door, thus leaving me alone with Richard. The young man turned to me with a very pale and woe-begone face.

"Did he destroy the will?"

"I fear he did."

"Is all that you say true?"

"Quite true. All that your father died possessed of is yours by law."

"But by right? By his wish?"

"Come to me to-morrow, and I will talk to you about that. I will not stay longer now."

Mr. Nimmo and I walked a good way in silence. At length he broke it by saying:

"That's a bad fellow."

"A thoroughly bad fellow; and his father knew it. He has defeated himself effectually, however."

"Evidently; though I cannot judge of that as well as you, not knowing the particulars. Oddly enough, it is the first time I have seen borough-English in action within my own experience, and I must say I consider this an example of its wholesomeness."

Bernard Proctor left Ipswich that same night, and was never again seen in the town. He did try to fight the case as he had threatened, but he had an honest man for his adviser than the adviser had for his client, and the suit never saw the dubious daylight of a court of law. When Richard pressed me for my advice as to what he ought to do for his brother, in spite of his ill conduct, I told him what had been the provision made for Bernard by his father before this latest development of his character, and Richard decided that he would carry out that intention. The first shock of the occurrence to Mrs. Proctor was great; but I believe she was secretly relieved by Bernard's absence, and had suffered much from the tyrannous greed of her eldest son.

We do not speak of him to the family who live at Hartleap Hall, where Lady Hartleap has her former rooms—very different now, and echoing to the patter of little feet and the sound of childish laughter, for her ladyship's grandchildren are numerous and noisy—but we hear of him at Ipswich from time to time. He is a very prosperous man; having induced Richard, five years after their father's death, to give him a large lump sum in lieu of his annuity, and forthwith departed to the West Indies, where he engaged in trade and married the richest and ugliest heiress in the region. He is much more wealthy than Richard Proctor, and, as he is childless, he has taken testamentary precaution against the possibility of his brother's coming in for any portion of his property; a proceeding which exactly meets Richard's views also. So

there is some sort of harmony between the estranged brothers; and I think I have proved that there was more romance about money than about love, in one case within my knowledge, at all events.

WHITEHOOF.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON.

I HAVE dined well in my time—perhaps as often as most men; but I never, in all my life, dined better than at The Braccialletto d'Oro. Judged by an artistic standard, the food was bad, the cookery was worse, and the wine of worseness double distilled. But I had brought with me a plentiful supply of hunger-sauce, and I had mixed the bad wine with the best spirits in the world.

Is love quite so incompatible with appetite as is conventionally assumed? If so, I was not in love; which is absurd. It was impossible to know Lucy Nugent without being in love; as impossible as to have ridden all the way from Foggia to The Golden Bracelet without being hungry, even though I had not seen Lucy for four whole years.

Yes: it was all that long while since she had gone off to her brother at Madrapore. Sometimes it felt like forty whole long years, sometimes like only yesterday, since we had said good-bye to one another down at Greenham, and had meant—well, a great deal more. Dick Nugent and I had been college friends, and it was at breakfast in his rooms in Trinity that I first met Lucy. Of course, it was in the May term, the season of boats and bonnets, when—but it made me old to think of it. In two years from that breakfast-party we had agreed that we might never marry, but that, if we ever did, I, George Vining, would have no wife but Lucy Nugent, Lucy Nugent would have no husband but George Vining.

But why should we ever have contemplated, in the face of such an agreement, the bare chance of our never being married at all? We had not contemplated it six months before. It might be some years before we could afford a house of our own, for Lucy's father was but vicar of Greenham—which was no prize—and I had just enough wherewith to live in chambers and go circuit, and not a penny more. Still, that does not mean hopelessness—Love conquers all. But all at once,

and without warning, came clouds, and out of the clouds came storms. Lucy's father died, without leaving a penny behind him. And, as fortune would have it, within one month of his death a political panic, for which I was in no wise answerable, reduced my own means to about a quarter of what was necessary to enable me to live at all. Then Dick Nugent wrote to his sister to come out to him at Madrapore. And there was no help for it—she had to go.

There was one comfort, only one. Madrapore is a very lonely station, and Lucy was not likely to console herself with a pundit or a rajah. Her brother, I knew, was the only Englishman, civil or military, within a district as large as Yorkshire. But her brother was not likely to spend all his days at Madrapore; he would be promoted or transferred; and the fullest trust did not prevent its being an article of faith with me that, wherever Lucy was, were it in Juan Fernandez, there would the eagles be gathered to wrest from me my beautiful quarry. No, the comfort that can be drawn from the departure to the farthest and remotest corner of Hindostan of the girl one loves is small indeed. And what grain of hope remained? None!

Fool that I was not to have been a reading man! A fellowship would have pulled me through—if Lucy could have waited some dozen years. With a sore heart, and after a hard fight—I may take credit for that—I made up my mind that the woollack was not for me. I need not recall the anxious days and nights I spent in making up my mind. It is enough that I decided as many have done before me. There is wool in the world besides that which stuffs the seat of the Lord Chancellor. I realised my capital, and took passage for Adelaide, South Australia. I had seen sheep at Greenham, so their look on the Murray River would not be altogether strange.

I was to leave Europe at Brindisi: and that is how I came to be riding south-east from Foggia through the Basilicata. And I think that, however hungry a man may be, he can hardly take his last ride in Europe without thinking of her whom he loved best at home in England, and still loves best in all the world.

And so I dined infamously well at The Golden Bracelet, and called for my horse and my bill.

"Instantly, eccellenza," said the girl who had waited upon me, and who had

hitherto represented to me the entire staff of The Golden Bracelet. She was unquestionably handsome, after the style of the Basilicata; tall, broad-shouldered, with arms that looked strong enough to knock a man down, and eyes black and bright enough to kill him. Her complexion was brown, her hair coal-black, and her name Tessa.

At least I had always understood that "subito," in Italian, means "instantly." But I presently found reason to change my opinion. Or, if it meant "instantly" through Italy in general, it bore another meaning in the Basilicata; or, at any rate, at The Golden Bracelet and with Tessa.

I had been dining in a rude kind of verandah covered with vine-leaves. As I emptied the bottle, I looked out across the country, and saw that the sun was lower than he ought to be, if I wished to reach Melfi by light of day. I rang with my knife on the rim of my glass.

"Tessa!"

"Subito, eccellenza—subito!" came from somewhere. And then I waited about twice as long as before.

I was about to tinkle on the glass with double energy, when,

"Eccellenza!" said another voice, just behind my left shoulder.

It was not Tessa's: hers was deep for a woman, but this was deep for a man. And it had a peculiar quality of its own—smooth, yet harsh, like the polished courtesy of a rough nature. I started, and looked round. The voice belonged to a splendid specimen of the peasant of the Southern Apennines—tall and broad, as strong as a bull, and as lithe as a deer, with a face that might have been justly immortalised in marble for its classical beauty. Tessa's black eyes were but a poor imitation of this man's, which, even in their present repose, seemed to flash and burn out of depths beyond all northern knowledge. He was dressed roughly, and not above his apparent station, but yet with an air that would have done him credit if he had been a prince instead of a peasant of the Basilicata. He was bare-headed, and held a flask in his hand—one of those delightful Italian wine-flasks, in which I could see the richest amber wine through the rushes.

"A thousand pardons, eccellenza. I am—I am the host of The Braccialeto d'Oro."

He drew himself up as he spoke; and I thought I had never seen such a specimen of a landlord in all my days, and never

would again. There was nothing of the landlord about the handsome Hercules who sold bad wine at The Bracelet of Gold.

"And I crave ten thousand pardons, eccellenza, because I have, until half an hour ago, been away from home. I learn from Tessa, who is a fool, that your excellency has dined; and I know but too well that he who depends upon Tessa dines ill. I cannot, even for the credit of The Golden Bracelet, invite your excellency to dine a second time—though there is some fish, and a lamb, that I have brought in with me, and that would tempt San Gennaro to make the Carnival longer by a day. But your excellency shall not at least have dined without wine. Ecco—Lacrima Cristi—and the best of it!" and, with a dexterous twist, he had tossed out the thimbleful of oil that did duty for a cork, and had filled a glass before I could say yes or no.

I did not say no, for, not to speak of manners, the wine was indeed of the very finest sort of the very finest kind.

I poured out a glass for my host, and a second for myself.

"It is sublime," I said. "And now let me have my horse"—I could not say "my bill" to such a prince among hosts—"and subito, subito, if you please."

"Your excellency's horse?"

"If you please."

"Impossible, eccellenza!"

"Why, what is the matter? Is anything wrong?"

"Only that in two hours it will be sunset, eccellenza."

"What, in two hours? Then I must be off indeed. I must be in Melfi before nightfall."

"Your excellency cannot be in Melfi before nightfall."

"But I must be. Why?"

"Because, eccellenza, no man can be in two places at once; so it is clear you will not be in Melfi if you sleep at The Golden Bracelet."

"But if I do not sleep at The Golden Bracelet?"

"Then, eccellenza, you will sleep—in the grave."

"What, in the name of nonsense, do you mean?"

"It is no nonsense, eccellenza. You are an Englishman."

"True. But Englishmen are not in the habit of going to bed in graves, until they die."

"But you will die. Drink, eccellenza."

And he poured me out another glass of the *Lacrima Cristi*.

I threw myself back in my chair. "Will you kindly tell me what you mean? And you had better help me with the flask while you do. I am pressed for time, and your wine is too good to drink alone."

"Thank you, eccellenza. If you stay at The Golden Bracelet, I can find you better still. Surely your excellency has heard of *Piedebianco*?"

"Never. But if you are going to tell me it is better than *Lacrima Cristi*, I tell you beforehand that I will not believe."

"*Piedebianco* is not a wine, eccellenza."

"What is it, then?"

"A brigand."

"Oh!" And I hummed the first bars of "*Agnese la Zitella*."

I suppose there was something a little contemptuous in my manner, for he frowned.

"He is not one of those who keep for ransom. His rule is: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and Dead men tell no tales."

"Indeed! Yes, I have heard of brigands; I have read of them in the newspapers, and seen them at the opera. But, somehow, I don't think I am likely to meet them on the road to Melfi."

"One always meets *Piedebianco* when it is not likely; that is his way."

"You seem to know his ways very well."

"He takes care of that, eccellenza. Ask in Foggia, ask in Ascoli, ask in Naples itself, what are the ways of *Piedebianco*. San Gennaro! I would as soon think of riding alone, after sunset, between Ascoli and Melfi, as I would—as I would of drinking that vinegar, eccellenza. No, you may not meet with *Piedebianco*; but then you may meet with *La Santissima*, and that would be worse still."

"And who is *La Santissima*?"

"His wife, eccellenza. He rides a brown horse with one white fetlock; that is why they call him *Piedebianco*. He has a wife, who is a devil; that is why they call her *La Santissima*. They go mostly together; but sometimes one meets one of them alone. And I would rather meet *La Santissima* than *Piedebianco*, and *Piedebianco* rather than *la Santissima*. And I would sooner meet them alone than together, and together than alone."

"Many thanks. It is all very interesting indeed. And now I will have my horse, if you please." I suggested the bill by

taking out my purse—which, for the first time in my life, was well filled.

"Pardon," said the host of The Golden Bracelet. "I will not be answerable, eccellenza."

"You will not bring my horse—have it brought, I mean?"

"Ten thousand pardons. No, eccellenza."

"Then I must get him myself; that is all. And pay yourself, please," I said, throwing down a piece of gold on the table, with all the improvidence of a man who carries his whole capital with him. "I have lost too much time already, and, Piedebianco or no Piedebianco, I must be at Melfi to-night, and at Brindisi to-morrow. The P. and O. won't wait for Piedebianco, nor even for La Santissima."

Some of my readers may think that even those extra glasses of *Lacrima Cristi* were not reason enough for going on with my journey so late in the afternoon, after all I had heard; but I had good reasons, nevertheless—or, at least, what seemed to myself to be good reasons at the time. First and foremost, I did not believe in Whitehoof, as I mentally translated Piedebianco. Brigands at large in the Basilicata! They lingered still in Sicily, I knew; but I also knew that Il Re Galantuomo had rooted them out from the mainland long ago, for good and all. Nor even at Foggia, not so far away, had I heard one word of gossip about either Whitehoof or about his wife. It was plain, I thought, how the land lay. It was not every day that a little country locanda, like The Golden Bracelet, got the benefit of an English traveller; who, of course, was a milord, with a million pounds sterling in his pocket. All is fair in love, war, and trade, and a little brigand-romance would not be a lie if it had the effect of keeping a guest a second day, or even one night more. And, above all, it was necessary, if I did not wish to lose my passage, to reach Melfi that night, in order that I might sail from Brindisi the next day but one. And, lastly, I doubt if there is any man so strong-minded, at six-and-twenty, as to say: "Very well; I will not go on because I am afraid." And, honestly, I did not believe in brigands, and therefore had no reason to be afraid.

I put down the gold piece so quickly because I thought, I hardly know why, that my host, if he had the wish to detain me, might, unless I hurried, play some trick with the horse I had hired at Foggia.

I certainly had no help in getting off either from him or from Tessa.

As I led my horse past the verandah, my host was looking out across the country, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Addio!" I said, as I mounted. "And if any friend of mine wants to know what *Lacrima Cristi* means, I shall send him to The Braccialeto d'Oro."

"A rivederci, eccellenza. I shall expect to see your excellency again in two hours."

"What—you still think I shall not reach Melfi to-night?"

"I am sure of it, eccellenza."

"And that I shall spend the night here?"

"Yes. Unless——"

"Unless?"

"Unless you spend it with Piedebianco."

"If his wine is half as good as yours I shall not complain. Addio!"

"A rivederci, eccellenza; if Piedebianco——"

I was getting sick of the name; and so I left the shelter of The Golden Bracelet, with Piedebianco in my ears.

Though a little late for starting, it was still a clear and cloudless afternoon when I renewed the pleasure of feeling myself again a free horseman on an unknown road. It was the first time I had been in Italy. And though I—we—had once dreamed of an Italian tour in another fashion, still, perhaps at least one man in every hundred will agree with me that mine was the best and pleasantest way of seeing a new country, and of letting at any rate one's heart take a holiday. By the time I had left The Golden Bracelet half a mile behind, I had forgotten the very name of Whitehoof, much more that of La Santissima. I was reckoning whether the Thames or the Murray is the nearer to Madrapore; not that it mattered, when both alike were removed by a life to come from where Lucy was, unless indeed she had found her way to Calcutta by now. Every step my horse made led me nearer to her in distance, farther away in time.

Such rides as this pass always through the heart of Dreamland. They are romances in themselves, even when the horseman does not carry his own dreams behind him. My horse, for an Italian hack, went well, but I let him—who would not?—drop into little better than a walk as I looked and lingered along the road. To north, south, and west were the mountains in the half-distance that form the spine of

Italy; in front, the fairly good road led over a broad undulating plain, on its way to the sea. The sun was moving towards the mountains, and already made my mounted shadow long before me. All was so wide, and bright, and open, that my spirits rose in spite of myself, and the wish almost turned into a thought that I was in truth a knight-errant, who might hope to win his heart's desire with his own good sword, in days when brigands might really be met with, and assistant-commissioners were wholly unknown.

Somehow the road from The Golden Bracelet to Melfi grew longer than I had expected. No doubt I had been going slower than I supposed. I gave another look at the receding Apennines before reminding my horse that I had hired him to trot and not to crawl. And a glorious sight they gave me. No cooped-up traveller knows the mysterious grays and the royal purple in which I saw them bathed as their points and ridges drew nearer to the sun. For some minutes I could not go on: I could only look and wonder. I doubt if such a glory of colouring is often seen, even there, where such a splendour happens not once in a lifetime, but every day, and is wasted upon the eyes of people like Tessa and her master. I, who had eyes to see, could not tear myself away or set my horse's head fairly towards Melfi. The gray whitened, the purple deepened, when—what was this? As if in an instant it had grown night, and the sun was gone.

I had forgotten the Southern suddenness of night, especially where mountains lie to westward. Happily for me, the road was plain enough and straight enough before me, or the host's prophecy about not reaching Melfi before next morning would have run a very fair chance of being fulfilled. Nevertheless it was awkward, even as things were. It is not so easy to ride after dark, on a hired horse, on an unfamiliar road, which might not chance to run straight to the end of the journey. I had lost every sort of reckoning as to how far I was from Melfi—it might be ten, or even fifteen miles more, for aught I knew. Who could have guessed that night would have come on so soon? I had counted on a long twilight, at least, and there had been none. For a whole minute I wished that I had stayed at The Golden Bracelet; for nearly half a minute I seriously thought of turning back. At any rate, I and my horse between us

would be able to retrace the road we had come. But even the half-minute's half-thought was unworthy a candidate for the bush. I pushed on.

Not since I left The Golden Bracelet had I met a human being. That was not strange; but I now wished for the unlikely good luck of asking how far it was to Melfi, and if I was for certain in the right road. Perhaps I might, after all, fall upon some farm or locanda, where I could make sure of my distance and my way.

Was it the night, or the road itself, that grew darker? I began, after awhile, to fancy the latter, but I could not tell. What made me fancy it the road was that the gloom appeared doubly opaque to left and right, as if I were passing between trees—or more likely rocks, since my horse's hoofs gave an echo. As I went on, listening to these double footfalls, and noticing how they seemed to come sometimes from before, sometimes from behind, I perceived another phenomenon about the echo—the farther on I rode, the nearer it seemed to come. Presently it gave up all pretence of coming from in front, and took to following only—harder, faster, nearer. It was easy to imagine that I was being pursued by another horseman, or by more than one.

I am not ashamed of having nerves, because I am not ashamed of being a man. It is nervous work, at best, to hear such echoes and not to see them. After a little I could not get it out of my head that the echo was not only an echo. I reined up—and it was not only an echo. The hoofs that followed me still came on, and at a quicker trot than mine had been.

Well—and what then? I had just been in need of a guide, and I needed one still. It was a public road, and all the horses in Italy had as much right to it as mine. Other people than I might have occasion to go to Melfi; and why should I let a nonsensical tale, that I did not believe, trouble my nerves? So I waited, and in less than a minute a real horse was beside mine, and a rough voice said, in some execrable South Italian patois:

"Good evening. Are you going to Melfi?"

My own Italian, such as it is, is Tuscan, or rather Dantesque, and the Basilicata dialect of my host of The Bracelet had puzzled me a little, though compared with this it had been pure. Still, I understood, and answered "Yes" only; there was a brusqueness and air of rough command

about the voice and the question, which seemed out of keeping with the patois of a contadino.

"It is a dark night."

"Very dark indeed. Is it far to Melfi?"

"Don't you know?"

"No. I am a stranger here. I left The Golden Bracelet about two hours ago."

"Ah!"

I don't know why, but I wished I had kept to my Yes, that I had not said I was a stranger, and that I had said nothing about The Golden Bracelet. My companion fell into silence, and so did I; but he made his horse keep pace with mine.

"Are you going to Melfi?" I asked at last, for the sake of saying something.

Before he answered, my ears, now beginning to grow quicker, caught yet another sound—the selfsame echo I had heard from before, and unmistakably following us from behind.

"And are you riding alone?" I asked again.

"Yes"—shortly and brusquely. "Are you?"

"Quite alone."

"Ah! Two are better than one. Not that I believe what they say. But still, after dark, it is best to be on the safe side."

"What do they say?"

"That there are more brigands than ever, since they were put down."

"You mean—Piedebianco?"

"Who?"

"Piedebianco."

"Perhaps so."

"La Santissima?"

"May be. You seem to know their names very well. Do you believe all these tales? Or half of them? But no—or you would not be riding here—alone."

"Then, for the same reason you don't believe them either," said I.

"The people are cowards. I don't mean you, because you are alone; unless you have nothing to lose?"

But that was just it—I had everything to lose; all I had in the world. Why should this strange specimen of a contadino ask if I had anything to lose? He did not believe in Piedebianco. But then I have always understood that the only man who did not believe in Cartouche was—Cartouche in person. And still that distinct echo followed from behind. Was it likely that there would be a third solitary and benighted horseman on the road to Melfi?

"That is true," said I. I have nothing to lose—except my way. Have you?"

Just then happened the loveliest sight of all—lovelier even than the mountain sunset which had beguiled me into this delay. The whitest of moons sailed out from behind the darkest of clouds, which she left edged with silver. She made the road as it led through the plain like a path in Fairyland. I saw then that at least half the darkness had been caused by a long and thick avenue of pines, which now stood out from the phantom night-mist at their feet like a forest of masts with black shrouds and green sails. A wind was rising, and curled the mist about into the likeness of a noiseless sea—utterly noiseless, but for the beat of our own horse-hoofs and for that goblin echo behind.

I looked at my companion; and did not like what I saw.

He was a very tall man in the very prime of life, wrapped from neck to ankle in a large black cloak with a hood. But I could tell that he was singularly broad of shoulder and long of limb. I should say—so far as the folds of his cloak did not hide all they covered—that, though inferior in symmetry to the host of The Golden Bracelet, it would be hard to say which would get the better if it came to a struggle between them. But there the likeness came to an end. Under a nondescript kind of hat, with a broad brim and a high crown, I saw a face, browned and tanned with wind and sun, which most assuredly would not have gratified a sculptor—especially if that sculptor had met it after dark on a lonely road. It was harsh-featured, with an expression half fierce, half sullen, or rather all fierce and all sullen at one and the same time. The expression could not be called precisely stupid, if only for the look of habitual power which always comes into the faces of those who command their fellow creatures. There was no mental force in this ill-looking contadino's heavy mouth and dull uncertain-coloured eyes. Over his upper lip was a short bristly moustache; his jaws and chin were covered by a thick and coarse brown beard, and his hair was cropped short—by the prison barber, I should have said, had he been an Englishman. And, from above one eye and right through one cheek-bone, was a long, villanous, scarlet scar. The man belonged to the voice, and the voice to the man.

Our eyes met in the moonlight, and, while we looked, I saw his right hand—he was on my near side—drop under his long cloak, he keeping his left hand on the

bridle, and never moving his dull eyes from mine. I thought I heard a click, like only one thing on earth—but I was not sure. And still the hoofs of the unseen horse beat on, nearer and nearer, from behind.

I did not let my look fall; but I saw something else without looking. He was mounted on a great brown horse, with one white fetlock.

I saw it all—fool that I had been! So much for my wisdom at The Bracelet of Gold. I had taken it for but a knavish hostelry; it was a house of call for highwaymen. It was doubtless there that the brigand had heard how an English milord, with a purse filled with notes and gold, was on the way to Melfi—alone. The host had done his duty to the law by warning me, and had doubtless, to follow, done his duty to his patrons by warning them; and I had, with my own lips, identified myself with him who was riding alone to Melfi, and had been dining at The Bracelet of Gold; and no doubt the *Lacrime Cristi* had been brought out, not to detain me for the paltry price of a bed, but to give me Dutch courage to reject it and to go on.

Yes, the trap was complete. According to the laws of sentiment, I should have been willing to die, since life with Lucy was not to be. According to the laws which rule real men, I drew out the revolver I had bought for the bush, and, before the brigand's right arm came out from the cloak—

"Piedebianco!" I said instinctively, and fired, and fired again.

Over went horse and man together. I heard a cry behind me, and the clattering of hoofs, which told me that the brigand was not alone. I made my hack from Foggia go as he had never gone before, keeping my remaining shots for the close quarters at odds that were likely enough to come. My hack from Foggia must have gone like the wind; the pursuit ceased, and, before I knew where I was, I had ridden into the midst of a company of Bersaglieri.

At first they took me for a madman, but when they found I was only an Englishman they were reassured.

The next day I was the hero of Melfi.

But who would be a hero? I have tried it, and I say, with all my heart, not I. I had killed Piedebianco, and all had been well that ended well, had that been all—if

the Southern Cross were not to sail from Brindisi next day.

I never studied Italian law; I can give no coherent account of visits to and from the *sotto-prefetto*, and the *sindaco*, and the rest; I do not know to this day whether I was myself in custody or no. I only know that every inhabitant of Melfi had something to do with the matter, and that I was not permitted to leave the town. So I had to put up at the hotel, by no means at free quarters, and submit to be lionised, as the English milord who had shot Piedebianco.

On the second day I rose at daybreak, and reflected that the Southern Cross was due to sail in two hours. Well, there was no help for it; she must sail, and I must make the best bargain I could with the company. The English milord who had shot Piedebianco managed to get a cup of coffee, and then, while waiting for his next interview with the *sotto-sotto-sindaco*, went into the courtyard of the inn.

Nothing was doing there; but suddenly I found myself face-to-face with—Piedebianco! whom I had left dead or dying on the road to Foggia.

I believed in brigands now only too well. But this was the ghost of one, unless all the stories of impudent brigandage I had ever read of in romances, or even in newspapers, were beggared by the impudence of Piedebianco, or Whitehoof, who walked into this very inn at Melfi as if it had been his own. Not for one moment was there any chance of mistaking the scoundrel; that villainous scarlet scar was alone enough to identify him at the antipodes, where I was not to go; and—sublimity of impudence—he was walking with the *sindaco*.

But—I must do him justice—he started when he saw me.

"There," he said suddenly to the *sindaco*, "that is the man!"

The *sindaco* rubbed his spectacles, and then his eyes, and then his spectacles again.

"Impossible, signor! That is the milord who shot Piedebianco. It is in the *procès verbal*, so it can't be otherwise." And he nodded at me as at an old acquaintance, of whom he was proud.

"Impossible or not," said Whitehoof, in his horrible patois, "that is the man. I saw him as close as I see you now; the moon was as bright as day. I bade him good evening, and asked if he was going to Melfi; for I thought, if he was, that a companion, where there was a chance of brigands——"

"There is no chance——" began the

sindaco, but stopped suddenly. Was there not before him the man who had killed Piedebianco, though now too bewildered by Piedebianco's impudence to say a word?

"—Where there was a chance of brigands would be as well. He evaded my question, and told me he was a stranger."

"You are not upon oath, signor."

"What—do you say one thing in Melfi when you don't swear and another when you do? Then he asked if I was riding alone. I chose to say Yes for reasons of my own. Then he began to talk about brigands by name, and I began to be glad I had been prudent enough to say I was alone. I told him I did not believe in them, nor did I, then. I fancied your law had been strong enough to sweep them away, since your king went to Rome. Then he asked if I had anything to lose. I had a great deal to lose; and when a ruffianly-looking fellow like that asked me in vile patois if I had anything to lose, I thought I had best cock my revolver. Then, before I knew what he was about, the fellow fired two shots at me, killed the horse, and left me lying on the road. He didn't stay to rob me—those fellows are bound to be cowards; and I suppose the lady's galloping up at the sound of the shot frightened him away. What he is doing here is more than I can tell. I call on you to arrest that man."

I a ruffianly-looking fellow—I speaking vile patois—I murdering a traveller and running away from a woman, though that woman was La Santissima! Had I also a scarlet scar? Did I also ride a brown horse with a white fetlock? Or was I in a dream?

The sindaco rubbed his eyes twice, and his spectacles three times.

"If what you say is true, signor—"

"It is true, every word."

"Pardon me," said the sindaco, with dignity. "One is entitled to assume anything—in law. If what you say is true, then the *procès verbal* must be untrue."

"Quite so," said Whitehoof.

"And, in that case, we must commence proceedings *de novo*."

"Good Heaven! When the man is Piedebianco himself!" said I.

"Piedebianco! When you shot him," asked the sindaco calmly, "with your own hand? If what *you* say is true, signor, then once more the *procès verbal* must be untrue. And, in that case, we must commence proceedings *de novo* once more; indeed, *de novissimo*."

"Signor Sindaco," said Whitehoof,

with impatient submission, "I am a gentleman I hope and believe, and it is clear enough this fellow is none. But I know it is the custom in some places to take the word of a native against that of a stranger as a matter of course, whatever the circumstances may be. But I know of no place on earth, none, where magistrates, who, like you, Signor Sindaco, are gentlemen, take the word of any man before that of a lady. If you will kindly let me bring the signorina, who was with me, she will say whether this is the man or no. She saw him when he turned in his saddle and fired as well as I."

La Santissima!

"Signor Sindaco," said I, in my turn, "that I fired at this—gentleman, I own, because I fired at Piedebianco. I have not the least objection to being identified by La Santis—by the signorina. But I must ask you to send a gendarme for her."

"I can recall no precedent," said the sindaco. "But," he said, at last, as if struck by a happy thought, "I will make one. Let the signorina be summoned."

But it was some time before a gendarme could be summoned to summon La Santissima; and meanwhile the three of us remained in the courtyard. As for the Southern Cross, she had sailed. There was nothing to gain by thinking of her any more.

At last, however, the gendarme appeared, disappeared, and returned again. I was beginning to take no further interest in Whitehoof, except to see how far impudence would carry a man. That I could be seriously detained on the charge of trying to murder a fellow-traveller, never entered my brain, so long as there was a British minister at Rome. No doubt the authorities were bent on smothering the affair, and, after all, I had saved my life and my purse, though I had not shot Piedebianco. So I hardly looked at the gendarme when he returned with La Santissima.

La Santissima? Heart of hearts! This was no virago from the Basilicata, this fair girl with those eyes—with Lucy Nugent's eyes, with Lucy's lips, and hair, and smile! If she herself were not at Madrapore—

"What is it all about, Dick?" she said to Whitehoof in English, and with the sweetest voice in the world.

"Look at that fellow," said Whitehoof, in his Italian. "Did you ever see him before?"

La Santissima looked at me a moment—strangely, almost wildly.

"Yes!" she whispered, so that I could hardly hear. "Four years ago—at Greenham! Oh Dick, what does it mean?"

"What the devil do you mean?"

But by that time Lucy Nugent's hand was in mine.

And there it has been ever since; and there it is now.

But it was not all at once that Dick Nugent and I could convince one another that we were we. For example, there was that terrible *procès verbal*.

"'Harsh featured, with an expression half fierce, half sullen,'" read Dick Nugent from the document, for a copy of which he had paid. We were drinking *Lacrima Cristi*—not so good as at The Golden Bracelet, but fair. "'Eyes deep set, dull, of doubtful colour, and stupid-looking. Complexion, brown and tanned. Nose, long. Moustache, short and bristly. Hair, cropped short. Jaws and chin covered with a thick, coarse, brown beard. Voice, harsh; manner, rude and abrupt; speaks very bad Italian, or rather, some sort of patois.' So, George, that is what I am like, according to you? I'll forgive your trying to murder me—but—et tu, Brute!"

"And you forget the scar," said Lucy.

"Never mind the scar. Do you know, George—?"

"But I will mind the scar," said Lucy. "I'm prouder of that scar than of anything—most things—in the world. George, that was given him by a sepoy; and some day I'll tell you how."

Dick coloured as scarlet as his scar. Madrapore might have tanned his skin and roughened his manners, but, somehow, in spite of his ugliness, I could see in his eyes that he was Lucy's own brother, after all.

"And I am 'an ugly-looking fellow, and no gentleman!' But, oh Dick, I could forgive you that if you had not accused me of speaking vile patois." Not a word was said of the shot, just then, that might have made me the murderer of Lucy's brother, and of as good and gallant a gentleman as I had ever known. Not even Lucy knew as yet how nearly we

had skirted the edge of tragedy. But we knew; and we had shaken hands without a word. And when Lucy had gone to bed, and before I had had time to realise that we had met thus only to part to-morrow, or to think over all that this would mean to me—

"Old fellow," said Dick, "I don't see why you should go out to shear sheep in Australia. It's not your line. You'd be mistaking your own shepherd for a bush-ranger, some moonlight night; and next time you might miss the horse and hit the man. Go to India, and practise there—before me, I hope, before very long. We shall be out again, I and Lucy, in six months' time."

"But——"

"Of course I know what that sheep-farming notion means. But if our great-uncle, Lucy's and mine, hadn't left us—never mind how much—we shouldn't have been riding homeward, *viâ Brindisi*: and if you hadn't taken that pot-shot at me, I shouldn't be able to lend you a thousand pounds, and give you a start. No nonsense, old fellow; you'd do the same by me. Only on one condition—that you'll never betray my personal appearance to a soul."

"But——" and I held out my hand. I could not, if I would, say more.

"There's no need for that 'but,' any way. Lucy's no more engaged than you are. I was going to say than I am, but that wouldn't be true. Holloa!"

There was a noise in the street—a noise, even in Melfi.

"*Piedebianco!* The Bersaglieri have taken *La Santissima* and *Piedebianco!*" everybody in the inn was saying, as Melfi turned itself out at doors and windows to see. Out we went, and looked too.

There, in the middle of a company of Bersaglieri with loaded rifles, dragged a cart; and in the cart was an iron cage; and in the cage stood, bolt upright, and with the pride of fifty murders in their flashing eyes, Tessa, and the landlord of The Bracelet of Gold.

Alas! I was no longer a hero, not even in Melfi.

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